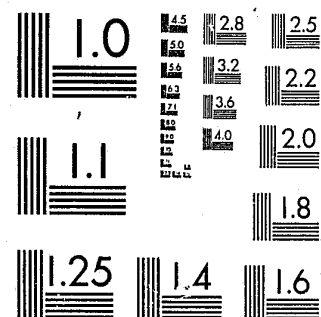


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# Federal Probation

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## This Issue in Brief

### ACQUISITIONS

**Guideposts for Community Work in Police-Social Work Diversion.**—Significant steps in community work involved in the development of police-social work diversion programs are described and analyzed by Professor Harvey Treger of the University of Illinois. Techniques and methods of work are suggested for practitioners interested in the planning, implementation, and operation of community-based programs. The effects of change on a system(s) are discussed emphasizing sensitivity to interpersonal, inter-professional, and interagency relationships, as well as client needs and issues of power and control.

**Issues in VIP Management: A National Synthesis.**—This article by Dr. Chris W. Eskridge of the University of Nebraska deals with a number of critical issues involving the management and organization of Volunteer-in-Probation (VIP) programs. While it is difficult to specifically identify why some projects fail and others succeed, it appears that management variables may well be the most powerful factors. This research effort was undertaken to provide an assessment of where we are now in regards to VIP program organization and management, and to identify areas of concern which suggest the need for future research.

**An Analysis of Contemporary Indian Justice and Correctional Treatment.**—Dr. Laurence French of the University of Nebraska states there is little doubt that the U.S. criminal justice system has a narrow, ethno-centric biased perspective that tends to view American Indians as "outsiders" to the dominant normative structure. He then proceeds to describe significant changes which have been effected with regard to treatment of the Indian offender—changes brought about

principally by efforts of the Native American Rights Fund.

**New Amsterdam's Jail Regulations of 1657.**—After the Dutch West India Company established a trading post at the tip of Manhattan in 1626, reports Professor Thorsten Sellin, the community of New Amsterdam grew as its population increased and within three decades the Company was compelled to grant the settlers substantial rights of self-government. Among the institutions developed was a jail and, in 1657, fairly detailed regulations were adopted for its management. It comes as no surprise that the regulations were practically copies from those of the old jail in Amsterdam.

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## Security Designation System: Preliminary Results

BY ROBERT B. LEVINSON, PH.D.

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IN THE MARCH 1979 issue of FEDERAL PROBATION there was an article (Levinson & Williams, 1979) describing a new inmate classification system which was being pilot-tested in the Federal Prison System. During its developmental stages and subsequent to the new procedure being adopted on a systemwide basis—on April 15, 1979—data were gathered to assess the effectiveness of this different approach to classification. This article reports on those preliminary findings.

A basic question that must be answered concerning the implementation of any new system, is: Has anything been improved? In order to answer this question six criteria were established; the new classification system would have demonstrated its utility if it:

- (1) Confined inmates in the least secure facilities for which they properly qualified.
- (2) Kept the inmate population in better bal-

ance throughout the Federal Prison System.

(3) Decreased the number of transfers, particularly for custody reasons.

(4) Reduced the number of inmates seeking placement in Protective Custody.

(5) Eliminated "preferential transfers" between institutions.

(6) Made better use of available resources.

Each of these points will be examined below using data collected from several projects conducted in the Western, South Central, and Northeastern Regions of the Bureau of Prisons (BOP).<sup>1</sup>

### Findings

(1) Are inmates appropriately confined in less secure facilities?

One of the charges frequently made by critics of incarceration is that correctional institutions "overclassify" their inmates. It is asserted that correctional administrators confine prisoners more securely than is warranted. The correctional administrator is faced with the dilemma of either

<sup>1</sup> The author is indebted to the following Bureau of Prisons Regional Research Administrators for making available the assessment data: Helene Cavior, Western Region; Jerry Mabli, Ph.D., South Central Region; and, Marshall Haines, Northeastern Region.

being overly punitive—locking up 95 percent of the inmate population in secure facilities appropriate for 5 percent of the prisoners—or being naively humane—assigning too many inmates to minimum security institutions and answering for large numbers of escapes.

The “appropriateness” of the new system’s designations was assessed in terms of number of escapes and number of assaults; an increase in either or both of these measures would be viewed as indicating that the new procedures produced inappropriate designations. Findings from several projects show:

- (a) The new approach did not increase the number of escapes from Safford, a Western Region minimum security prison camp. The escape rate was 2 per 100 inmates for the first 6 months during which the new system was in operation, the same as it had been for the 6-month period prior to the new system’s initiation.
- (b) The escape rate from the nine BOP institutions in the Northeast was compared for two time periods—3 months prior to and 3 months after the new system was initiated; overall there was a decrease in the rate-per-100 inmates with only the minimum security facility showing a slight increase.<sup>2</sup>
- (c) Comparing assault rates for a 6-month period under the new system with the same 6-month period prior to its beginning, table 1 shows no overall change—1 per 100 inmates. Additionally, although two of these facilities showed an increase, and two showed no change, five institutions showed a decrease in assault rate.

TABLE 1—Assault Rate Per 100 Inmates (NE Region)

	PRE: 6/12/77— 12/14/77	POST: 6/12/78— 12/14/78
Lewisburg (S/L-5)	.76	1.1
Petersburg (S/L-3)	2.0	2.9
Danbury (S/L-2)	.80	.41
Allenwood (S/L-1)	.21	0
Lewisburg Camp (S/L-1)	0	0
Morgantown (S/L-1)	.81	.52
Petersburg Camp (S/L-1)	0	0
Alderson (Administrative)	1.3	1.2
NY-MCC (Administrative)	1.8	.74
TOTALS	(51 incidents)/ (5120 inmates) = 1.0	(48 incidents)/ (4765 inmates) = 1.0

Thus, it would appear that the new system does make appropriate designations in terms of

<sup>2</sup> The new Security Designation System categorizes institutions into six security levels—S/L-1 being most minimal to S/L-6 most maximum—based on their perimeter security and both internal and external architectural features; an additional Administrative category is used to assign inmates when reasons such as medical/psychiatric needs override security considerations.

both escape and assault rates. What is the evidence that indicates that it also places newly committed prisoners into less secure institutions?

Prior to the start of the new system, designations were made by BOP Community Programs Officers. In the Western region a comparison was made between the actual designations they made and what institutions would have been assigned for these same inmates if the new system was followed (table 2). Using a simplified weighting procedure, designations made under the previous and the new approaches were compared. The figures in table 2 were converted to a “designation index”—the higher the index the more secure the institutions to which the inmates were assigned. (The number of inmates placed in each security level was multiplied by the “value” of that facility; e.g., three inmates assigned to S/L-4 results in a designation index of 3 × 4 = 12.) Eliminating those prisoners sent to Administrative Facilities, the previous system has a designation index of 49/31=1.58; while under the new system it would be 47/35=1.34. The new system does place inmates in less secure facilities.

TABLE 2—Distribution of Inmates by Previous and New Systems

	Levels of Security						
	A*	1	2	3	4	5	6
Previous system	4	22	5	0	3	1	0 = 35
New system	0	27	4	4	0	0	0 = 35

\*A = Administrative

Therefore, the answer to question one is: yes. The new designation system does confine inmates appropriately in less secure institutions.

(2) Has the new system brought the total Bureau of Prisons into better balance?

One of the problems it was hoped the new designation system would rectify dealt with the issue of some institutions being greatly overcrowded while others—located in areas distant from large population centers—were underutilized. The effect the new approach has had in “evening out” this overpopulation burden is difficult to assess in light of the Bureau’s overall decline in population. In December 1977 the Federal system averaged 27 percent over physical capacity with a standard deviation among its institutions of 43.7; in October 1979 BOP was 4 percent above capacity with a standard deviation of 35.1. To the degree that a smaller spread in percent-over (or percent-under) capacity represents a more even distribution of inmate population, there is some indication a better balance has been achieved.

In addition to a mal-distribution of numbers of prisoners, another problem was recognized; namely, the need to achieve a better racial balance across institutions. Table 3 compares two time periods (pre- and post-initiation of the new system). At each Security Level the institution with the highest and lowest percentage of black and white inmates was listed; their difference in percentage points is shown in the parenthesis. The result of a comparison between the figures in parentheses is reflected by: "decrease" (—), "increase" (+), and "no change" (=). For both the black and white inmates the "spread" decreased in 3 of the 5 security levels; overall there were 6 decreases, 2 increases, and 2 no change.

TABLE 3—Change in Racial Distribution of Inmate Population

		Black			
		(5/21/79)		(12/3/79)	
S/L 1	Hi	56%		49%	(43%) —
	Lo	7%	(49%)*	6%	
S/L 2	Hi	48%	(41%)	44%	(36%) —
	Lo	7%		8%	
S/L 3	Hi	69%	(51%)	68%	(51%) =
	Lo	18%		17%	
S/L 4	Hi	48%	(15%)	53%	(22%) +
	Lo	33%		31%	
S/L 5/6	Hi	62%	(30%)	60%	(28%) —
	Lo	32%		32%	
		White			
		(5/21/79)		(12/3/79)	
S/L 1	Hi	85%	(42%)	78%	(29%) —
	Lo	43%		49%	
S/L 2	Hi	91%	(40%)	88%	(32%) —
	Lo	51%		56%	
S/L 3	Hi	71%	(41%)	70%	(38%) —
	Lo	30%		32%	
S/L 4	Hi	63%	(12%)	65%	(19%) +
	Lo	51%		46%	
S/L 5/6	Hi	67%	(29%)	69%	(29%) =
	Lo	38%		40%	

\* Difference in % points between Hi and Low

$$\frac{\text{Dec vs. May}}{\text{No.}} = \frac{1}{6} + \frac{1}{2} = \frac{2}{2}$$

Thus, the answer to question two is: yes. As a consequence of the attention paid to this factor, the new designation system appears to have brought the institutions of the Bureau of Prisons into better balance.

(3) *Has the new system decreased the number of transfers?*

Apparently almost all correctional systems suffer with the problem of too many transfers. One possibly apocryphal story tells of the correctional system that had more transfers in 1 year than it had inmates.

The thinking which underlies the new designation system focused on the idea that if inmates were "correctly" assigned initially, there should be less need for continual shifting. It was recognized that movement "up" or "down" the security levels was important, but the hope was that such changes could be systematized, and by making them more consistent, be reduced. This would not only diminish a burden for management, but it would help inmates avoid the constant upheaval and program disruption caused by excessive transferring.

Data collected during the first 4 months of the Western region designation project indicate a 13.5 percent decrease in transfers to camps, compared with a 4.3 percent increase in camp transfers during this same time period in other regions. Moreover, data for the entire Federal Prison System show that the average of transfers per month decreased from 925 before the new system was begun to 366 after it had started.

Consequently, it would appear that question three can be answered in the affirmative; the goal of reducing transfers seems to have been accomplished.

(4) *Has the new system reduced the number of inmates seeking protective custody?*

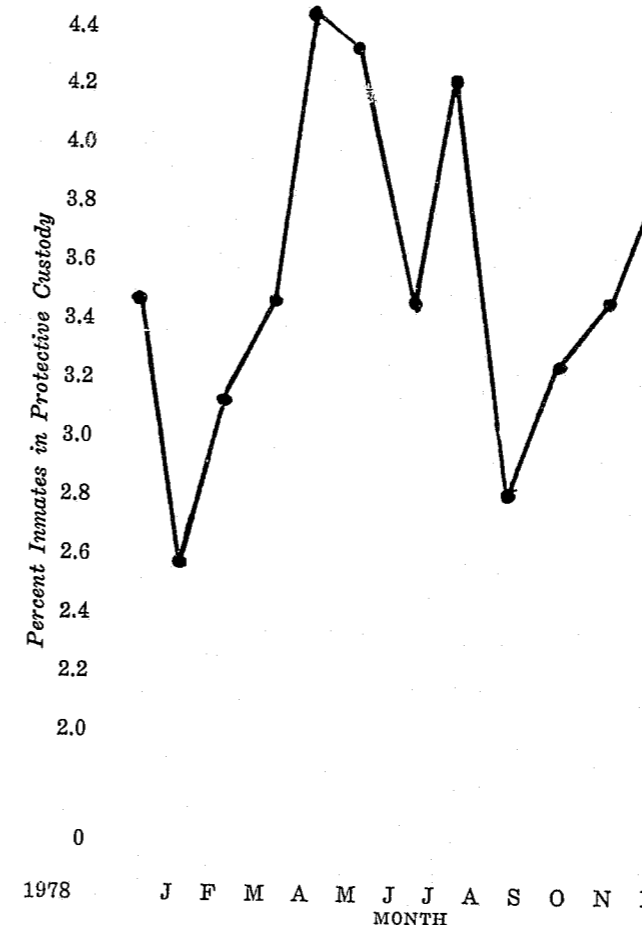
In every prison system there are a number of inmates who for a variety of real or imagined reasons feel they cannot live in the general prisoner population. Such individuals seek protective custody to shield them from contact with other inmates.

It was hoped that by developing a system which consistently assigned similar kinds of prisoners to the same facility, that those living there would feel less threatened by their fellow inmates. The positive consequence would be that these people would not voluntarily confine themselves in more restrictive protective custody and therefore be able to participate to a greater extent in potentially helpful programs.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of inmates in protective custody at a Western region S/L-5 institution during the year 1978. The percent of S/L-5 inmates in the facility's population rose from 1.5 percent in January to 15.4 percent in December. As the sine-like curve shows, the per-

cent of inmates in protective custody did not follow the hoped for slope downward.

FIGURE 1—Percent Lompoc Inmates in Protective Custody (Average N = 1082)



The answer to question four, is: no. The new security designation system has not reduced the number of inmates in protective custody.

(5) *Have "preferential transfers" between institutions been eliminated?*

Over the years many correctional systems build up informal arrangements between certain institutions. That is, the warden at facility "A" will take transfers from warden "B's" institution (and vice versa) but for some reason inmates from institution "X" never seem to get accepted in either "A" or "B."

The designers of the new designation system saw this as detrimental. Not only are inmates being treated unequally, but such schemes may

<sup>3</sup> It was anticipated that this change in policy would bring about much dissatisfaction since the wardens were being asked to give up some of their former authority. Their response was that they would support the new system provided it had integrity, since under the old system "all they really had was begging authority!"

prevent an individual from being assigned to the most appropriate facility.

By new policy, wardens no longer have transfer authority. While the institution and its warden may recommend a transfer, the final authority to initiate such action rests with the appropriate Regional Office and its Designation Officer.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, under the new system the opportunity for "preferential transfers" has been eliminated; and question five can be answered: yes.

(6) *Is better use being made of available resources?*

Another of the hopes that the designers of the new designation system had was that by approaching the inmate assignment process in a more consistent and rational fashion, it would permit identifying where available resources were actually needed. For example, at the time the Bureau's population soared above its physical bed capacity, many managers thought that more, secure-beds were needed. Indeed there were preliminary plans to request funds for another level six facility. The new approach enabled the Bureau's Executive Staff to better analyze the system's needs. As a consequence, additional minimum security beds were sought. These are more easily found and less expensive to build. It is estimated that the cost of constructing one secure bed is \$39,000; each minimum security bed costs \$13,000. In terms of a 500-bed facility, use of the new system would result in a savings of over \$1 million dollars per institution.

Additionally, current planning in the Bureau is beginning to look at resource allocation (staff positions, funding) in terms of types of institutions. For example, the staffing pattern for a security level one institution might be quite different than for a security level four.

Thus, the answer to question six, seems to be: yes. The new designation system has already resulted in better utilization of available resources and this is likely to continue in the future.

### Conclusion

In terms of six assessment criteria, it would appear that the new designation system has demonstrated success in five areas: less secure, appropriate confinement; better balance; fewer transfers; elimination of "preferential transfers"; and better use of resources. It failed, thus far, to reduce the number of inmates in protective custody.

Several other advantages of the new procedure have yet to be mentioned. One of these concerns inmate complaints and the elimination of a possible source of inmate litigation. The existence of a designation system provides documentation for the decisions that staff are required to make in order for the Federal Prison System to function. Should an inmate challenge a decision, the system provides a means for explaining the bases for the choice and serves to refresh memories about past events.

Additionally, having a consistent, systematic method for making designations affords management a powerful tool for altering problem situations when they arise. An example of this occurred at one of the Western region camp facilities. It became apparent that, unlike other

prisoners, when certain illegal aliens get closer to a release date they become more of an escape risk—they do not want to be sent back to Mexico. The consistent procedures of the new security designation system enabled the problem to be corrected by changing the "weight" given to specific factors. As a consequence, the camp's population changed in 1 year from 56 percent illegal alien to 28 percent.

This highlights the final advantage of any system; namely, that such an approach gives the decisionmakers a means to fine-tune their operation. It suggests the truth in the statement: Something can be done about everything.

#### REFERENCE

Levinson, R.B. & Williams, J.D.; "Inmate Classification: Security/Custody Considerations," *FEDERAL PROBATION*, March 1979.

# END