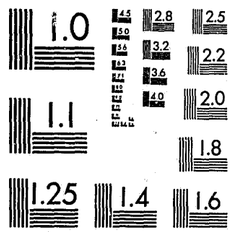

VOCATIONAL TRAINING EVALUATION

PROJECT REPORT ONE

"EVALUATING PRISON PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO INCREASE THE EMPLOYABILITY OF FEDERAL OFFENDERS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE"

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Increasing the employability of offenders is often held to be the measure of a successful rehabilitation program. Criminal offenders are frequently undereducated, unskilled, and unemployed. The apparent lack of economic opportunities available to offenders is often cited as a major cause of crime (see for example, National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, 1973). The Bureau of Prisons Task Force Report (1973) on crime and employment notes that "while it is difficult to conclusively establish a causal relationship, available evidence does suggest that employment is at least one of the more important variables explaining criminal behavior." Burns (1975) summed up the argument relating employment to crime as follows:

> In 1931 Austin MacCormick said that the philosophy of prison education assumes the prisoner an adult in need of education. Only secondarily did MacCormick consider him a criminal in need of reform. Over the ensuing years other assumptions have emerged. First, it is assumed that ex-offenders will be less likely to return to crime if they can earn a legitimate living on release from prison. A secondary assumption is that their employment potential will be increased if they have work skills for which there is a ready demand. A related assumption is that these work skills can be provided through effective prison training programs. Objectives of prison education are still tied to assumptions such as these.

There are a number of programs available to federal offenders to help them find employment. There are four basic approaches by which the Federal Prison System attempts to increase the employability of offenders.

1) Programs teaching a specific job skill.

The most direct way to increase the prospects for employment are programs designed to teach salable job skills. Activities offered in this area include occupational education, "on-the-job" training, and apprenticeship programs. There are a wide variety of skills taught including auto mechanics, welding, plumbing, surgical technician, heating and air conditioning, carpentry, and computer programming.

2) Programs teaching general skills necessary for employment.

In addition to vocational training there are numerous educational programs to help offenders upgrade the academic skills and credentials needed to qualify for positions above the subsistence level. These include Adult Basic Education designed to bring offenders to at least the point of literacy, Adult Secondary Education to help offenders earn a high school equivalency degree, and Post Secondary Education offering offenders college experience. Also included here are social education and life skill programs teaching offenders how to write a resume, how to look for a job, and how to conduct themselves at a job interview.

3) Programs to motivate offenders and improve work habits.

One major purpose of both Federal Prison Industries and institution details is to give offenders experience at working in a structured setting and developing such qualities as punctuality and industriousness. Also included here are social education programs designed to increase motivation to look for work and to promote a "positive attitude."

4) Community based programs.

Community programs such as work release or placement in a Community Treatment Center are designed to give offenders the opportunity to gain work experience in the free community before release. The programs also offer

employment assistance counseling and job referral services.

PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Employment programs in general have often been criticized as being outmoded, inefficient, and ineffective (see for example, Levy, et al., 1975). The skills taught are sometimes outdated with little salable value in the community. The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (1973) has written that offenders "are trained too often in a skill for which there are no jobs at all or no jobs in the community to which they will return." Other authors have questioned the causal links between crime and employment. Burns (1975) for one, feels that is is a "weak assumption" that the lack of education or training causes crime.

Previous evaluations of federal programs in particular have shown mixed results. Generally these evaluations have centered around four areas.[1/]

1) Quality of the instruction.

Evaluations of the quality of the instruction have considered such standards as accreditation by outside agencies, comparability of the facilities with the private sector, and organization of the course work. Cronin (Cronin, et al., 1976), for example, found that while vocational training in federal prisons was limited in scope and variety, the quality of the instruction was fairly good. Cronin found that 85% of the contracted instructors and 75% of the civil service instructors were certified by an accrediting agency and that the "instructional preparation was generally satisfactory." In a "limited assessment" of on-the-job training, however, Cronin felt that the teaching evidenced little planned instruction and was oriented more towards productive work and institution maintenance.

In an earlier study of occupational training, the Institute for the Study of Crime and Delinquency (1968), while making a number of recommendations for

improvement, felt that the institution staff were of "excellent quality." Curry (1975) in an evaluation of the educational programs at Fort Worth also commended the prison personnel for their outstanding work and for the rapport established with residents.

Mintz (1976), however, criticized Federal Prison Industries for being subservient to the prison bureaucracy and training prisoners for non-existent jobs on the outside. The Sterling Institute (1968) also examined Federal Prison Industry operations. The researchers studied furniture manufacturing at Ashland and furniture and tire reconditioning at Petersburg and found that the "value of the job skills learned in these industries is generally low." Many of the jobs could be learned "in hours, if not in minutes" and that many of the skills were not marketable on the outside. The authors also felt working in Industries did not help offenders establish good work habits:

> Although stressed by supervisors and staff, the value of work habits learned in the industries was generally low, with the possible exception of the tire industry at Petersburg. Satisfying a work supervisor who is tolerant and interested in helping is not the same as satisfying a production supervisor on the outside. The industries employ approximately twice as many men as would be required in a similar industry on the outside. Turnover and "call outs" for administrative and other reasons are disruptive and add to the unreal work environment. Inmates do not have the option of not going to work, nor are they concerned with building a good job reference.
>
> There is no need to earn money to pay for the necessities of life, nor is there any significant opportunity to spend what is earned on things which would set the individual apart from his peers. At Ashland, working in the industry often connotes a negative accomplishment, since the practice there is to assign to the industry many inmates who are considered "untrainable".
>
> There is little in this environment to encourage the development of marketable work habits, the work habits that potential employers say they want -- promptness, good attendance, and a willingness to learn and to work.

Sterling Institute also evaluated education and vocational training programs at Petersburg and Ashland and drew three major conclusions: 1) education and training programs "generally compare favorably" with similar programs on the outside, 2) both education and training could be improved, and 3) both programs are not "sufficiently related" to what employers require.

Studies of the education and training programs at Milan and Terre Haute (Hitt, et al., 1968) and at Alderson (Urban Resources, 1971) were also largely negative. The evaluation at Milan and Terre Haute identified a number of problem areas including vagueness and conflict in institutional objectives, lack of coordination between programs, "little semblance of on-the-job training" in either Industries or prison detail, and a lack of systematic program evaluation. On-site visits to Alderson revealed that "institutional, custodial and other program needs take precedence over rehabilitation goals." The investigators at Alderson felt that vocational and academic training were not coordinated and that most job assignments, with some exceptions, would not realistically lead to job opportunities after release.

2) Offender perceptions.

Offender perceptions on the utility of employment programs have been surprisingly positive. Cronin (Cronin, et al., 1976) found that offenders "rated over 80 percent of the occupational education programs in which they were enrolled from good to excellent" and "generally expressed high satisfaction with instructors and instructional techniques." Cronin also found that 90% of the residents "felt their instructor was fair, organized in his preparation, and showed a genuine interest in his job."

Other unpublished data on inmate perceptions of federal programs tended to support the findings of Cronin. Based on a sample of subjects interviewed at Lewisburg and Danbury in 1976, 18% rated vocational training

programs as not useful, 29% as somewhat useful, and 53% as very useful. Similar results were found for education programs with 16% rating education as not useful, 22% as somewhat useful, and 62% as very useful.

Preliminary data collected by the United States Parole Commission (Meierhoefer and Hoffman, 1978) indicated that when the parole decision is not dependent on participation in prison programming, inmates enrolled in fewer education and counseling programs but continued to participate in vocational training and industry programs at the same rate. The authors hypothesize that participation in occupational education and industries did not drop off when parole was removed as an incentive because the programs were "perceived by the inmates to be either relevant to their personal goals or because they are simply seen as an interesting or profitable way to spend one's time in the otherwise bleak prison environment."

In other research, a report (Baker et al., 1973) on Project Newgate and other community based college programs found that a "very high proportion" of the inmates studied felt that courses and instructors were of a high quality. Murdock (1977) found that a large majority of the students who attended Community College programs at Texarkana felt that their training was helpful in finding a job. In a study of the Atlanta Correctional and Industrial Counselor Program, a special project that included work related counseling, Hall (1971) found that feelings expressed by participants concerning the program were "79% positive." Finally, a NARA evaluation conducted by CONSAD (1974) found that a comparison group (non-NARA subjects) identified vocational training as the most useful prison program.

On the negative side, a study by McKee (1971) examined federal offenders returning to the Los Angeles area. He found that "almost unanimously" offenders preferred training in the community and felt that institutional training programs were ineffective and not particularly useful. Also, evaluations of

institutional programs at Alderson (Kane and Lee, 1977) and Butner (Kane, Lee, and Saylor, 1978) found that residents believed that programs such as vocational training were necessary but were "uncommitted" concerning their usefulness at the institutions examined.

3) Psychological measures.

In a relatively unique investigation, an evaluation of occupational education at La Tuna (Walker, et al., 1975) found that program participants showed significant improvements in self concept and social attitudes while incarcerated. Staff ratings also indicated that offenders showed significant improvements in knowledge of subject matter and performance of specified skills after program participation.

4) Post-release outcome.

Evaluations considering post-release outcome have looked at both criminal behavior and positive social adjustment in the community. Data on the effectiveness of employment programs have generally found no effect on recidivism, but a few have found differences on social adjustment measures.

A study of releasees in 1970 (U.S. Bureau of Prisons, 1974) found no difference in recidivism between those who participated in vocational training or education programs and those who did not. The study, however, did not control for possible background differences between participants and non-participants.

The Community Treatment Center Field Study (Beck and Seiter, 1978) found that subjects referred to a Community Treatment Center established better employment records compared to a control group. For example, at six months after release to the community (controlling for differences between the groups) the CTC group was employed an average of 90 days and earned an average of $3,000, while the control group was employed 69 days and earned $2,238. These differences were significant at the .001 level. In addition, both high and low

need individuals benefited economically from CTC referral. There was no evidence, however, to indicate that referrals to Community Treatment Centers were engaging in criminal activity less often or that their criminal activity was relatively less serious.

Similar findings were reported in evaluations of Project Newgate (Baker, et al., 1973) and the Asklepieion Therapeutic Community at Marion (Paddock and Scott, 1973). The researchers studying Project Newgate found that college programs had no effect on recidivism, but did increase the "total proportion of ex-convicts engaged in socially acceptable behavior." Participants in college programs changed jobs less often, spent more time after release either employed or in school, and showed less evidence of alcohol or drug abuse. The evaluation at Marion found that a treatment program utilizing "confrontive group therapy" showed "clearly better employment-related adjustment for program participants, especially in terms of lower unemployment rates." No differences were found on recidivism.

The Federal Offenders Rehabilitation Program (1969) evaluated a number of special projects across the country designed to provide "intensive" vocational rehabilitation to federal offenders. Comparing program participants with a control group, the researchers found no differences in recidivism and wrote that "the controls exhibited somewhat higher employment rates and income, while the experimentals presented a somewhat higher proportion of white collar jobs." The authors, however, questioned the validity of the employment data due to its incompleteness. In addition, limited replications of the study controlling for variations in treatment found "perhaps some improvement in employment in a couple of projects."

In a lengthy examination of the effect of institutional experience on employment, Pownall (1969) wrote that the "striking finding" in his study was "the rather limited impact institutional training and work experience had on

post-release employment." Pownall found that "less than one-third of those who received training utilized training in their post-release jobs" and that generally vocational training and work assignments did not affect employment rates after release. It was found, however, that offenders with a year or more of training had somewhat higher post-release employment rates as did those with high performance ratings on institutional work assignments. The positive relationship between work performance ratings and post-release employment was taken by Pownall as evidence that prison programs can help establish good work habits:

> These figures indicate that those persons who demonstrated good work habits and performed their jobs in a manner that was viewed as very good or excellent by the work supervisors were more likely to have success in the area of employment upon release. While we cannot be certain to what extent these good habits were already present or to what extent they came from prison experience, it seems likely that the institution made some contribution to the development of good work habits for some persons. This appears to have been a major factor in the degree of employment success experienced by those who acquired good work habits. This provides further evidence that a major contribution of work in prison to rehabilitation is its habituation of inmates to regularity in constructive and rewarding employment.

An earlier study conducted by the Federal Prison System (U.S. Bureau of Prisons, 1962) found that "work experience and training in the institution have little relationship to the occupational level or type of work obtained on release." Similar results were reported in a well known work by Glaser (1969) which also examined a sample of federal releasees. Glaser found that the prison experience "proves useful in post-release employment to about only a quarter of those who acquire work during the first four months following release." However, Glaser does hold out the hope that prison work assignments can motivate offenders to seek employment after release although the work may be unskilled and may not relate to any learning acquired in prison:

> The data brought together in this chapter, in conjunction with those presented elsewhere, suggest: At present the post-release employment of at least half the men released from prison does not involve a level of skill that required an appreciable amount of prior training, but for the minority who gain skills in prison at which they can find a post-release vocation, prison work experience and training is a major rehabilitative influence. This ties in with the findings that: (1) prison work is able to provide a more regular employment experience than most prisoners will previously have had; (2) prior work regularity is more closely related to post-release success or failure than type of work; (3) relationships with work supervisors are the most rehabilitative relationships with staff personnel that prisoners are likely to develop. From this diversity it seems reasonable to conclude: It is not the training in vocational skills, but rather, the habituation of inmates to regularity in constructive and rewarding employment, and the anti-criminal personal influences of work supervisors on inmates, that are the major contributions of work in prison to inmate rehabilitation.

In other research, Dickson (1970) found that of 47 dental technology trainees released from Lewisburg, four were recommitted, five were not available for follow-up, and the remaining 38 were employed as dental technicians. The follow-up period was for varying lengths of time up to five years after release.[2/]

CONCLUSIONS.

While there are a number of contradictory findings in the studies reviewed, at least a few general impressions can be drawn from the results:

- Investigators who expressed a view were generally impressed with the dedication of prison personnel involved in training or education.
- Many inmates report a high regard for prison programs.
- A recurring criticism was that the work situation in prison and the skills taught are irrelevant to employment after release.
- Many researchers felt there was little coordination between the various programs an inmate might be involved in.
- Available data indicate that some prison programs can improve the post-release employment records of offenders, but that few, if any, programs affect recidivism.

In reviewing prison programs, however, it must be recognized that institutional programming has goals beyond the education and training of offenders. One major goal is to provide services useful to the institution. Institution details and some training programs provide services such as food preparation, sanitation, and building maintenance. Prison Industries may also generate revenue by selling goods and services to other government agencies. A second major purpose of prison programs is the promotion of institution discipline. By structuring time and eliminating idleness, prison programs tend to reduce inmate hostility and may provide a more humane institutional environment. Both of these goals are sufficient justification for prison programs apart from the question of their effectiveness in training offenders or reducing recidivism.

OFFICE OF RESEARCH
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FOOTNOTES

1/ A study was included in the review if it concerned a federal prison program and drew some conclusion about the quality or effectiveness of the program. Except for introductory citations, general discussions of offenders and employment, evaluations of state programs, and reviews of federal programs that do not involve evaluation (e.g., summaries of available programs) are excluded.

2/ Data on institutional program participation, post-release employment, and recidivism have been collected on a sample of releasees to the Eastern District of Michigan (Haimes and Wash, 1973). The data from this study are being reanalyzed and will be presented in a later report.

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