Collaborative and Creative Research to Advance Evidence-Based Practices

ACE! conducts collaborative and creative research to assist policy makers and correctional practitioners with using evidence-based practices and treatments. Along with our partners, we at ACE! work to craft new policies focused on preventing criminal behavior instead of simply responding to it.

ACE! Faculty, Students and Staff

Director: University Professor Faye S. Taxman
Deputy Director: Assistant Professor Danielle S. Rudes
Project Director: Amy Murphy
Program Manager: Gina Rosch
Postdoctoral Research Fellow: Brandy Blasko
Researchers: Michael Caudy; Marissa Kiss; Jackie Knightshade; Jennifer Lerch; Stephanie Maass; Mary Mbaba; Courtney Porter; Elizabeth Ressler; Heather Toronjo; Terry Wilkins; Michael Williams; Sandra Wise
Graduate Research Assistants: Lauren Duhaime; Victoria Goldberg; Kaitlyn Humphrey; Kimberly Meyer; Catherine Salzinger; Lincoln Sloas; Teneshia Thurman; Jill Viglione
Office Assistant: Julian Burke
Volunteers: Kresenda Keith

Current ACE! Projects

DC-RISES: DC-Reentering Inmates Strategies to Enhance Sustainability
DFE: Desistance Second Chance Act
EMTAP: Evidence Mapping to Advance Justice Practices
Evidence Based Community Supervision: Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (MDPSCS)
Fairfax Juvenile Probation Project
Implementing Advanced Evidence Based Practices in Virginia’s Community Corrections System
MAPIT: Motivational Assistance Program to Initiate Treatment
RNR Simulation Tool: Risk-Needs-Responsivity
STRIDE: Seek, Test, Treat, Retain for HIV Positive Opioid Dependents
SOARING 2: eLearning System to Support RNR Principles
YOURs: Demonstration Project of Your Own Reentry System

Advancing Practice
A publication of The Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence (ACE!)

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CONTACT US
Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence (ACE!)
George Mason University
4087 University Drive, 4100, Mail Stop 6D3
Fairfax, Virginia 22030
website: www.gmuace.org
email: ace@gmu.edu

Email us to suggest a topic for the next publication!
Criminal justice reform is a “hot” topic in today’s policy, practice and research realms. However, the meaning of reform is ever-changing as new research sheds light on difficult-to-answer questions. Two important components of the reform process are the construction of new ideas and improvements in methods that enhance existing practice. These are complementary issues that are important to stay current with ever-changing consumer demands. At the Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence (ACE!), our agenda is to create tools that have an impact on criminal justice and treatment systems at various levels—from clients, to programs, to agencies, to larger systems. This is what motivates the work we do everyday. We are fortunate to have the support of the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and other key partners such as the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, National Institute on Drug Abuse, the Public Welfare Foundation, and others.

In this issue of Advancing Practice you will learn about our continually expanding portfolio of translational tools. The first is an eLearning system--SOARING2--which provides web-based training coupled with internal coaching for community supervision officers to help them integrate key skills into practice. SOARING2’s applications continue to grow as we explore different methods and audiences for training and coaching staff.

The second tool highlighted is a comprehensive suite of tools, collectively called the RNR Simulation Tool, designed to apply the principles of Risk-Need-Responsivity to practice. The underlying database is a tribute to the ability to link databases to create an “ideal” dataset of individual-level factors with various outcomes. The flexibility of the system allows users to explore how best to integrate research concepts into daily practice in their agency/jurisdiction.

Finally, the pièce de résistance of the Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence’s innovative translational tools stems from emerging ideas about the use of technology to advance practice—apps for smart phones and computerized interventions—to help increase use of research and outcomes. ACE!, in concert with our key partners, is working on two new tools. The first, MAPIT, aims to increase individuals’ motivation to start, continue and complete treatment, and address a myriad of problem behaviors. The second, YOURS, includes a Smartphone app that blends motivational techniques with a game-like design to encourage individuals to set goals and learn to monitor their own progress.

To advance dissemination of these innovative tools, we are working to create a system of experts to support agencies that wish to use these tools. To further that aim, ACE! initiated a series of educational seminars and workshops on these various tools. Contact us at rnrtool@gmu.edu if you are interested in participating in these workshops. We also have online videos and training tutorials. Various jurisdictions have joined the collection of organizations using these tools to advance practice, including the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, Hidalgo County Texas Community Supervision and Corrections Department, New York City Department of Probation, Philadelphia Adult Probation and Parole Department, Virginia Department of Corrections, and many more!

We look forward to working with these, and a myriad of partners over the next few years as we continue to advance the field with innovative tools to engage users at all levels of the criminal justice and/or treatment systems in using evidence-based practices to improve justice outcomes. We have much to do, much to discover, and much to disseminate!

Faye S. Taxman
Director, Center of Advancing Correctional Excellence (ACE!)
MAPIT: Theory Behind the Innovation

By Jennifer Lerch, ACE! Research Associate, Teneshia Thurman & Lincoln Sloas, ACE! GRAs

When developing new innovations that target changing clients’ behaviors, researchers and practitioners must build these using sound theoretical frameworks. Particularly with the growing use of automated innovations (Hester & Miller, 2006; Moore, Fazzino, Garnet, Cutter, & Barry, 2011), incorporating underlying theoretical frameworks becomes more important to strategically target desired outcomes. The Motivational Assistance Program to Initiate Treatment (MAPIT) is an automated motivational program that aims to change probationers’ behavior by increasing substance abuse treatment initiation and retention, increasing HIV testing and care, and decreasing criminal justice involvement. This motivational program targets these behaviors through the use of three underlying theories intended to change a client’s behavior. These include: 1) the extended parallel process model (Murray-Johnson, et al., 2005); 2) social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), and 3) elements of motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2012)

Supporting the extended parallel process model (e.g., reducing harm through balanced self-efficacy and optimal risk messages), MAPIT provides the client personalized feedback about their potential risk of recidivism based on their criminal justice background and current dynamic factors (e.g., criminal peers, family ties, substance use). In presenting the clients with these risks, MAPIT offers clients the ability to test how changing some of these risks (e.g., criminal peers, employment, substance use) can impact their overall risk for recidivism. Following the social cognitive theory (e.g., comparison to others and modeling), the program then reviews clients’ substance use over the last 90 days by comparing their reported use to national usage rates (Figure 1). Further supporting this theory, clients listen to testimonials of other probationer’s reasons for changing behaviors throughout the program. A positive, engaging, person

---

Figure 1: Showing potential static risk

Figure 2: Comparing substance use
centered style of motivational interviewing is blended throughout the entire pro-
gram. Clients provide reactions to the information back to the computer through-
out, while also setting goals and developing strategies for success in changing
behaviors.

The merging of these theories provides a unique motivational program that
provides information to clients (e.g., criminal justice risk, amount of use, need
for HIV testing) in a non-confrontational, positive tone that allows clients to take
ownership of choices they make. The client’s experience can differ greatly from
other experiences with the criminal justice system, where a more typical focus
includes reacting to negative behaviors. MAPIT and in-person motivational inter-
viewing in a randomized controlled trial that launched in February 2013 are cur-
rently being compared. For more information about MAPIT and its development
see http://www.gmuace.org/research_MI.html. To see clips from the program
go to:

http://youtu.be/9yV6bTn1tVE;
http://youtu.be/XEZ5o48WwTg;
http://youtu.be/u2SHWG0QXe8;
http://youtu.be/wMShVdPpcsW.

References

Developing Mobile Technologies to Influence the Behavior of Individuals Involved in the Criminal Justice System

By Victoria Goldberg & Jill Viglione, ACE! Graduate Research Assistants

Researchers in physical and mental health fields are increasingly implementing technologies, such as mobile applications, to encourage self-help and behavior change. For example, mobile applications focus on changing health behaviors including one’s physical activity level, healthy eating habits, disease control and monitoring (e.g., glycemic control of diabetes) and alcohol, tobacco, and drug cessation (Klasnja, Consolvo, & Pratt, 2011). These applications are appealing to scientists because of: “(1) the widespread adoption of phones with increasingly powerful technical capabilities (Rainie, 2011), (2) people’s tendency to carry their phones with them everywhere, (3) people’s attachment to their phones (Venta et al., 2008), and (4) context awareness features enabled through sensing and phone-based personal information” (Klasnja and Pratt, 2012, p. 185). Despite growing popularity in the health arena, use of mobile technology interventions to promote behavior change is limited within community corrections settings.

Many people, even those not involved in the criminal justice system, have certain areas of their life that are challenging or that they need help with. In probation settings, these trouble areas—often directly related to offending behavior—are called “criminogenic needs” (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). Examples of criminogenic needs include housing, employment, education, and finances. A critical part of the probation process is targeting the needs of offenders as a means of reducing recidivism and future involvement in the criminal justice system.

As part of the **Your Own Reentry System (YOURS)** project, researchers at ACE! are collaborating with the George Mason University Serious Game Institute (SGI) to develop two mobile applications (apps) for probationer use. Probationers will use the mobile apps to monitor their own progress and influence the decisions they make regarding people, places, and things that affect their ability to be crime (and drug)-free. The goal is to empower individuals with information about their past behaviors (and results) to improve future decisions and behavior. The YOURS project aims to improve probationer outcomes such as obtaining employment.
and housing, lowering recidivism rates and successfully completing probation requirements by encouraging goal creation and completion.

In an upcoming pilot study, researchers will assign probationers one of the two mobile applications, “Onward” and “LifeQuest” or a paper workbook that mirrors the games in content. In all three app versions, probationers begin by completing a risk and needs assessment that identifies their risk level and greatest areas of need such as drug/alcohol abuse, criminal peers/associates, or housing. The applications and workbook then provide an individualized experience for the user, guiding them to set and achieve goals within their specific areas of need. The ultimate goal is to empower the probationer and place them in the “driver seat” of their own destiny.

How is it Innovative?

OURS introduces innovative mobile technology to empower probationers to take charge of their probation experience.

References


SOARING 2 New Heights with Coaching

By Lauren Duhaime, ACE! GRA & Stephanie Maass, ACE! Research Associate

SOARING 2 is an eLearning system for probation and parole officers to help build knowledge and skills related to evidence-based practices (EBPs) for effective offender management. This process includes using risk and needs instruments to determine appropriate levels of treatment and control, working to build offender engagement and motivation to change, involving offenders in the case planning process and teaching offenders how to recognize and manage their triggers as they navigate the road to desistance. SOARING 2 consists of five training modules at three skill levels (basic, intermediate, advanced): 1) risk-need-responsivity, 2) motivation and engagement, 3) case planning, 4) problem solving and 5) desistance. The web-based training, with built-in coaching and supervision feedback, is a translational tool for justice professionals to help bridge the gap between research and practice. The goal is to increase the uptake and use of EBPs (Friedmann, Taxman, & Henderson, 2007; Young, Dembo, & Henderson, 2007; Henderson, Taxman & Young, 2008). SOARING 2 facilitates the implementation of evidence-based concepts, knowledge and skills into practice.

Funded by the Bureau of Justice Administration (2010: DG-BX-K077), the ACE! team first implemented SOARING 2 in six U.S. pilot sites. The sites met criteria for availability of computers/internet, ability to provide coaches, willingness to participate in various data collection efforts and benefit of SOARING 2 to the organization. The sites vary in agency size, number of participating staff and prior experience with EBPs. Each site implemented SOARING 2 in slightly different ways. Some gave officers a dedicated day to complete each of the 15 modules with coaches nearby to provide assistance. Others provided three to six month deadlines for completion and allowed officers to work at their own pace.

Additionally, five sites included coaching to build skill use beyond the web-based training; one site was unable to implement coaching due to union constraints on peer evaluations. For these sites there were at least three coaches and 30 officers and participating staff received a coach to provide ongoing feedback throughout the study. Administrators selected coaches at each agency and were most often deputy probation officers (see Table 1). The staff under each coach received random assignment to either an observation group or a no-observation group. Each month, the coaches observed three officers from each coach’s observation group during a client interaction. At the end of each observation, coaches rated the officers’ use of skills using a common rating form. Coaches also provided individualized feedback to each officer after every observation.

“Implementing an EBP is a process and investment, it is important to understand this from the beginning, because it does cost money; whether it is paying for coaching or providing staff the time needed to dedicate to this process, it is money. The overall reduction in recidivism is something that you will be able to measure, but the ultimate return from your investment is the restoration of offenders’ lives and their families, which is priceless.”

- Rodolpho Perez, Supervisory Probation Officer with the Hidalgo County Community Supervision and Corrections Department

Table 1: Challenges and Solutions for Observations of Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Coach classification</th>
<th>Implementation/Challenges</th>
<th>What may work better</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Deputy Probation Officers</td>
<td>High resistance to implementation</td>
<td>Host an on-site meeting to build organization culture more in favor of innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Deputy Probation Officers</td>
<td>Low resistance, severe geographic challenges impeding coaching</td>
<td>Use training officers or supervisors at satellite offices as coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Deputy Probation Officers</td>
<td>Moderate resistance</td>
<td>Host an on-site meeting to build organization culture of innovation contingent upon follow-up survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Deputy Probation Officers/Training Officer</td>
<td>Low resistance</td>
<td>Reduce the ratio of officers to coach; exclude training officers from coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>No Coaching</td>
<td>Low resistance</td>
<td>Use supervisors as coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Volunteer Supervisors</td>
<td>Low resistance, challenge with implementing coaching</td>
<td>Reduce the ratio of officers to coach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 summarizes the coaches’ positions, level of officer resistance, challenges faced implementing observations and recommendations for easing future implementation at each site. Throughout the pilot study each site encountered a number of challenges while implementing the training and coaching components of SOARING 2. Coaches noted that the biggest challenge for them was completing the observations on time. Other challenges include organizational shifts and time to compete modules within agency-designated deadlines. These challenges carry the potential to hinder officers’ training and skills use. The observations and feedback involved in the SOARING 2 coaching process is crucial to building and maintaining skills use so officers do not slip back into old patterns over time. The unique combination of the coaches’ position, agency structure and the climate and culture within each participating organization results in varying degrees of resistance to change among officers and difficulties in completing observations as planned.

The number of observations coaches completed at each site varied considerably. On average, coaches completed 38 observations over the study period (minimum of three; maximum of 82) with each officer observed approximately seven times (minimum of 1; maximum of 20). Table 2 shows the average effects of coaching on the use of skills over the study period as captured by scores on the observation forms. This table illustrates three distinct groups of officers: those who demonstrated no change in their skills use over time, those who increased their skills use, and those who decreased their skills use. Changes (or lack of change) in use of skills differed by area of skills, with officers showing the most improvement in skill use relating to problem solving. Despite the fact that a number of officers demonstrated either no change or a decrease in use of skills, there was still a statistically significant increase in officers’ aggregate skills use over time (Figure 1). Decreases in skills may in part be due to regression to the mean (officers who began with high rates of skills use who naturally reverted to average levels of use over time) or a drop in the use of one previously performed skill while officers learned and practiced new skills. A lack of change in skills use may indicate difficulty in learning certain skills and/or that a longer observation time is required to observe change. Regardless of differences in observed skills use among officers and in different skill areas, the findings indicate a direct link between the number of times an officer was coached and their use of skills; officers who were coached more often demonstrate better use of skills over time.

**Table 2: Observed Changes in Officers’ Use of Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RNR</th>
<th>Engagement &amp; Motivation</th>
<th>Problem Solving</th>
<th>Working Alliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Change</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1. Increase in Use of Skills Over Time**

SOARING 2 provides consistent, cost-effective access to web-based training for criminal justice front line staff on five areas of evidence-based practices.

**How is it Innovative?**
The SOARING 2 pilot study provided the opportunity to implement an innovation in six U.S. community corrections offices. In doing so, site administrators found SOARING 2 provided officers a common base of information using a shared language which advances officer communication with each other. One participant stated SOARING 2 also offered supervising officers, “An opportunity to learn or enhance EBP skills in an effort to better assist the officer and department in enhancing public safety, offender rehabilitation, and victim restoration” [Deputy Probation Officer]. After completing the pilot study, five of the six sites requested full implementation of SOARING 2 with all their officers.

Adopting an innovation requires a commitment from the entire organization. Site administrators can help ensure the successful adoption of evidence-based practices by preparing their staff and creating a culture supportive of innovation. The SOARING 2 training model assists sites with this process via internal coaches who act as change agents to motivate officers and provide sustainability in the use of new skills over time.

Screen shots from SOARING2’s online tool

References


The principles of Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) establish that agencies can improve outcomes for individuals in the criminal justice system by assessing for and addressing static criminal risk, criminogenic needs (e.g., antisocial peers, antisocial cognitions, substance use, antisocial values/thinking) and behavioral health factors (e.g., mental health, trauma) (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). With these principles in mind, a team of researchers from ACE!, the University of Massachusetts-Lowell, Maxarth, LLC., and web developer Slonky, LLC developed the RNR Tools to assist agencies in determining what programming will reduce recidivism and improve treatment outcomes among their population. Project funding comes from several public and nonprofit partners, including the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and Public Welfare.

Another goal of the RNR tools is to inform resource allocation and help jurisdictions identify service gaps. The tools consist of three linkable portals that provide decision-support at the offender, program, and system level: Assess an Individual; RNR Program Tool for Adults; and Assess Jurisdiction’s Capacity. Assess an Individual, designed for line staff, provides recommendations on the best fit program for an individual based on 17 questions about offenders’ risk, needs, and lifestyle factors. This tool takes data input by the user. The RNR Program Tool for Adults examines program content, quality, dosage and other factors of services/treatments/controls. Assess Jurisdiction’s Capacity provides recommendations for programming needs based on the profile of offenders in the jurisdiction and identifies gaps in services. The tools are usable independently, but are designed to inform one another to impact recidivism at a system level.

The RNR suite of tools went live on ACE!’s website (http://www.gmuace.org/tools/index.php) on January 2, 2012 and recently completed the pilot phase. Eight jurisdictions participated in the pilot by providing data on offenders in their jurisdictions, such as demographics, criminogenic needs and criminal risk level. A number of sites also invited community, residential and facility-based programs to use the RNR Program Tool for Adults to assess the quality of their programming and to inform the tools as to the breadth of programs available in a given jurisdiction. In addition to providing jurisdictions with guidance on how to target limited resources, the data from the pilot helped the ACE! team refine the tools and the scoring processes.
Recognizing the unique characteristics and challenges that accompany specialized problem-solving courts, such as drug courts, we developed a series of additional questions in the RNR Program Tool that are specific to specialized courts. The questions on specialized courts address communication between and among members of the treatment team and specialized court, points of contact, frequency of team meetings, and other factors that represent effective practices in problem-solving courts.

Another dimension of this project includes conducting observations of the programs who complete the tool and volunteer. These observations give us the opportunity to learn more about the degree of fidelity to the model the programs are implementing as well as to what programs have entered into the tool.

One of our “early adopter” sites is the Probation Department of a mid-size city on the west coast. We have been working with this jurisdiction since spring 2013. In addition to receiving and analyzing a set of data on the probationers in this, we conducted a series of meetings with treatment providers and asked them to complete the RNR Program Tool. This helped determine the population needs. To date, 37 programs are in the database, with the largest number of programs focusing on substance abuse/dependence. Table 1 shows the distribution of programs in this jurisdiction. This jurisdiction would benefit from increasing the number of programs that address criminal cognitions—a common issue in multiple sites.

The total scores for programs in this jurisdiction ranged from 30% to 85%, with most scoring around 50%. Through meeting with the programs and reviewing the results, we found several common issues, some of which were system-wide and outside the programs’ control. For example, all programs received low scores in the Risk domain because available programs do not currently receive client risk scores. Therefore, they cannot group clients by risk level. The Probation Department resolved to address this issue by creating a secure web portal where they can share risk/needs data with programs as needed.

Other areas with numerous issues were in implementation and responsivity. For example, a number of pro-

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**Case Study**

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**Table 1. Program Category Distribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Group Description</th>
<th>Number of Programs in Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Severe Substance Use Disorders</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Criminal Thinking</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Self-Improvement and Management</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Social and Interpersonal Skills</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Life Skills</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Punishment Only</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
grams target too many areas of need, rather than focusing and drawing from several curricula or choosing an effective model and administering it with fidelity. The Probation Department and ACE! are working with programs to develop targeted improvement plans. Once the data on individual offenders in this jurisdiction is integrated, the site will have a better picture of where its service gaps lie and where to target resources in the future.

Where We Are Going...

As more and more jurisdictions request the RNR tools, we will incorporate these new data to continue refining the assumptions that underlie the tool. We are also in the early stages of developing new refinements to the suite of tools, such as an RNR Program Tool for Juveniles and adding more information on gender-specific programming for adults. Also in development is the Estimate Cost Reduction Tool, which will allow users to view the cost savings that can result from reduced recidivism, and the reentry-specific RNR Program Tool. To learn more about the tools and test-drive them, visit http://www.gmuace.org/tools/index.php.

Reference

A frequent complaint among U.S. employers notes a desire for employees with high writing proficiency and critical thinking skills (Hansen, n.d.). Likewise, law schools and graduate programs look for similar skills and characteristics when choosing which students to admit to their programs. Yet, for many undergraduate students, locating opportunities to build a research skill set is challenging. The Undergraduate Research Lab at ACE!, provides a structured, supportive environment where Mason’s undergraduate students with an interest in corrections learn, develop and practice research skills through their work with on-going, externally funded research projects under the guidance of graduate student mentors and faculty.

What is most unique about the Undergraduate Lab is its' focus on engaging all undergraduate students in research projects regardless of previous experience, grade-point-average or year in school. If an undergraduate is interested in the work we do at ACE! and is willing to learn and commit their time and energy to ACE!, we welcome them to our team for a summer or a semester or more.

Most often, the Undergraduate Research Assistants (UGRAs) at ACE! work for credit via CRIM 498: Research Practicum (generally 3 credits for ~135 hours of work over a semester). However, the program is becoming so popular we now have several students each semester who volunteer their time (without pay or credit)—just to gain research experience. To facilitate the UGRA experience we rely on a “nested mentoring model” whereby graduate students in the Criminology, Law & Society M.A. or Ph.D. programs at GMU serve as graduate mentors to each UGRA and faculty mentors oversee the graduate students (and UGRAs). In this role, the graduate student mentor trains the UGRA to do the work required on a particular research project, supports and supervises them throughout the semester and provides periodic assessment of their work. We find the strength of this relationship is lasting and rewarding.

This semester, we have five UGRAs working at ACE! (one for credit, one who formerly worked for credit and is now working for pay, two work-study students and one volunteer). The projects and tasks these UGRAs are working on include:

- Coding qualitative data from probation field files using a qualitative software program, Atlas.ti;
- Validating fidelity (adherence to program) among counselors working with criminally-involved clients via coding of audio-taped counseling sessions;
- Conducting literature searches and assembling literature reviews (drafts);
- Coding and analyzing qualitative interview data on inmate mental health from a large project at several state prisons;
- Assisting faculty and students build presentations for academic conferences and meetings using findings from several research projects/studies,
- Recruiting and interviewing HIV and opioid-using clients for a drug trial study, and
- Beta testing (and providing feedback) for a set of online training modules for community corrections officers.

How is it Innovative?

The undergraduate research lab at ACE! is one of the few places where Mason undergrads can get first-hand experience working with faculty and grad students on research projects with real-world application for improving policy and practice.
Besides building student resumes and invigorating a love of research, the UG Lab improves student: 1) research skills (Pederson, 2010; Raddon, Nault and Scott, 2008); 2) knowledge of the discipline (Becker, 1986; Firebaugh, 2008) and 3) critical thinking (Grauerholz, 1999; Massengill, 2011) through daily exposure to a real research environment and a hands-on approach to learning.

Students interested in a UGRA position at ACE! should send their resume and cover letter to drudes@gmu.edu. Employers interested in hiring ACE! UGRAs should contact anyone at ACE! to discuss skills/training matches and think about how ACE! prepares the best trained individuals for life post-graduation.

References


**Undergraduate Research Assistant Helps with SOARING 2**

*By Margot Klepetko, Undergraduate Research Assistant at ACE! (Summer, 2013)*

At the beginning of my undergraduate research assistant (UGRA) experience at ACE!, my primary responsibilities included coding data for the SOARING 2 project. This data included needs assessment information for offenders from one of the study’s pilot sites. The information was stored in the site’s record management system in such a way that it was impossible to analyze prevalence of individual needs. After experimenting with several formulas in Excel, I cleaned the data file (N=5998) to isolate individual needs and code it to identify prevalence and changes in needs from initial measurement to current for each individual. Next, I worked with my graduate student mentor on the project, Stephanie Maass, to analyze the data and prepare the findings for dissemination. Completing this task introduced me to range of other research skills that will allow me to be successful in the future. For example, I now possess experience using data coding and statistical software such as SPSS and Excel. Additionally, I improved my writing skills by learning how to write a research paper based on a research question of my choosing and my own data analysis. This also offered an opportunity for me to fine-tune my research and literature location/review skills, which will undoubtedly become invaluable throughout my future endeavors. I was also fortunate enough to work with several very talented and knowledgeable professionals at ACE! and learn about all of the different projects they are working on. All in all, my experience at ACE! represents an instrumental component of my undergraduate education and the perfect beginning of my professional career.
Qualitative Research on Female Prisoner Reentry: An Undergraduate Research Assistant’s Perspective

By Jasmine Oliver, Undergraduate Research Assistants at ACE! (Summer, 2013)

During my time at ACE!, I worked on one project with graduate researcher, Jill Viglione as my mentor. Jill visited a female re-entry home for over two years. During her time here, Jill spent time with residents, staff and volunteers to understand the challenges and issues faced during reintegration back into the community. Through my participation in the ACE! Undergraduate Research Lab, I had the pleasure of listening to and transcribing recorded field notes from her time in the field.

The reentry home is a place where previously incarcerated women go to gain the skills necessary to successfully re-enter into society. There are rules and restrictions, of course, that accompany this new freedom, which some of the women struggled with occasionally. Different volunteers led weekly sessions at the house on different topics where the women were able to engage in conversation and participate in interactive activities. During these sessions, the women learned about different interviewing skills, creating a resume, methods of interpersonal communication, and how to navigate a computer including creating an email, searching for jobs, and so forth. Jill met dozens of women during her time at the re-entry home, with differing backgrounds and experiences. Although the women all had experience with the criminal justice system, they each had a different story to tell.

By working on this project for several weeks, I was able to gain a better insight into what qualitative fieldwork entails. Field notes are what researchers are seeing, hearing, and thinking along with others’ words and experiences. When listening to some of the stories from the women at this re-entry home, I could not help but imagine that I could be any one of them and how I would want for a second chance to continue my life in a safer, healthier manner. I am a strong advocate for rehabilitation. I even wrote a couple of research papers on prisoner rehabilitation for my classes. I believe re-entry homes are an excellent service offered by the criminal justice system for people exiting correctional facilities. I would like to research what other techniques, programs and exercises we can incorporate into the criminal justice system to reduce recidivism. Hopefully in the future I will be able to participate in more projects with ACE! and possibly begin to piece together components for my own research project.
As undergraduate research assistants (UGRAs) at ACE! during the summer of 2013, we worked on several different projects including: Motivational Assistance Program to Initiate Treatment (MAPIT) and Evidence Based Practices in Maryland’s Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (MDPSCS). Both provided unique experiences and helped us learn about real research by actually doing it, rather than just reading about it.

With the MDPSCS project, we read probation officers’ case files and code the data for future evaluation. Specifically, this project enhanced our analytical thinking as well as our attention to detail. Our primary task is to take already small pieces of information, analyze and interpret the information, then turn the information into smaller pieces of data by determining the proper coding using Atlas.ti (qualitative data management software). Attention to detail is very important to analyze the information properly. The research we are doing with MDPSCS is important because it is our job to create data codes that are both broad and narrow enough to allow the story within the case files to be evaluated. The codes we create determine how the data may later be organized, analyzed, and interpreted.

With MAPIT, we primarily work with conducting data validations (assessing the fidelity—or how closely case managers are adhering the study protocol. We listen to audio recordings of interviews with randomized clients, code the client’s responses and compare it to the data that the interviewer recorded. We look for inconsistencies in the interviewer’s data and provide the interviewer with feedback and suggestions to improve data accuracy. While working with MAPIT, we drew on an array of skills that usable in our everyday lives, as well as in our future careers. Of the skills learned, working on MAPIT promotes a greater sense of detail, heightened senses, time management and our ability to multitask. All of these skills are important and transferable to other jobs/occupations. As UGRAs on the MAPIT project, we work closely with interviewers to validate the data they collect from each interviewee. Experience with the SPSS data program is also an important take away for the future because this broadens our capability to use and analyze a vast number of data sets.

Another benefit to working at ACE! includes the continual opportunities to engage with graduate students and other research professionals who have experience in the field. This allows greater insight into possible careers we might pursue. Working with upper level doctoral students such as Jill Viglione, Teneshia Thurman, Jennifer Lerch, and Lincoln Sloas provides better insight in the field of research and criminal justice as a whole. The ACE! graduate students are always available to assist us and to give their best judgments. More importantly, working closely with them has built lasting relationships and improved our growing interest in the field of corrections and criminal justice more broadly.

As our summer with ACE! comes to a close, the experience and knowledge we gained will help us grow as young professionals. Combining the skills learned while working on both the MDPSCS and MAPIT projects is important for whichever path—academic or practitioner—we decide to take in the future. Thank you, ACE!
Studying the effects of a prison-based rehabilitation program in The Netherlands

By Anouk Bosma, Leiden University

Last summer I had the opportunity to spent time at the center for Advancing Correctional Excellence (ACE!), at George Mason University. At ACE!, I worked on my dissertation, benefiting from the expertise of Dr. Taxman and other ACE! research associates. Spending time in the U.S., and working together with ACE! Researchers, broadened my mind and provided me with new ideas (and questions) regarding imprisonment, rehabilitation and the Risk, Need, Responsivity (RNR) framework. Furthermore, being at ACE! provided openings for further collaboration. In this article, I hope to inform you about my research project-- part of a unique research project on imprisonment we are currently conducting in The Netherlands.

Similar to re-offending rates in North America, recidivism rates amongst ex-detainees in The Netherlands are high. Studies show that within six years, seventy percent of former inmates are re-convicted. And, almost half were re-sentenced to prison in that same period (Wartna et al., 2010). To reduce re-offending rates in the Netherlands, the Dutch government developed a prison-based rehabilitation program: the prevention of recidivism program.

Research on prison-based rehabilitation programs

Designed in line with the “what works” evidence, the prevention of recidivism program is a voluntary prison-based rehabilitation program for a broad offender population with a prison sentence of at least four months. The program aims to reduce re-offending rates amongst participants by assessing their risk for recidivism and criminogenic needs (problems directly related to criminal behavior) and by applying specific treatment programs that address these risk and need factors (Van der Linden, 2004).

Unfortunately, little is known about this programs’ implementation and functioning. For example, we do not know how many offenders enter and complete the program or what their characteristics are. Likewise, we do not know what kind of treatment program (e.g., cognitive skill training, or substance abuse treatment) they are offered and if they are referred to treatment that aligns with their risk and need profiles. What’s more…it is unclear if the program is effective in reducing recidivism among participants. To fill these gaps, our current study aims to answers these questions. We do not, however, just intend to assess if the program works, we also aspire to advance understanding of the mechanisms through which effective interventions work, by testing several hypothesis derived from criminological and rehabilitative theories explaining correctional rehabilitation program effectiveness.

Using a large-scale, longitudinal dataset, consisting of official registration data from various sources, and information from interviews and self-administered questionnaires, we are able to: (1) study determinants of prison-based treatment allocation and (2) examine determinants of treatment participation and completion. This data also allows us to (3) assess the program’s effectiveness in reducing criminogenic risk/needs and re-offending rates among participants while taking into account allocation and participation determinants and gives insight into (4) explaining variances in treatment effectiveness.

My research on the effectiveness of prison-based rehabilitation programming in The Netherlands is embedded in a larger project, the PRISON PROJECT, a research project that focuses on the effects of imprisonment.

Research on imprisonment

Imprisonment is the most severe sanction meted out in The Netherlands. Similar to the massive growth of
incarceration numbers in the US, imprisonment rates in The Netherlands have risen dramatically in the last few decades. At this moment, about 12,000 people are detained in a Dutch prison cell and an average of 35,000 alleged offenders are imprisoned each year.

Despite the large number of people affected by imprisonment, there is surprisingly little known about the effects of imprisonment on the lives of detainees and their families. Studies suggest that many detainees leave prison under far from optimal life circumstances, facing physical, psychological and economic difficulties (see Dirkzwager et al., 2004; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Hammett, 2001; Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Petersilia, 2000; Travis et al., 2001; Western et al., 2001). However, we do not know if these conditions were caused by their imprisonment. We also know little about the effect of imprisonment on several life domains (such as socio-economic status, physical and mental health, marriage and divorce, social networks and the effect imprisonment has on partners and children of detainees) and future re-offending.

Therefore, in The Netherlands, we are conducting a large-scale longitudinal research project examining the effects of imprisonment on the further life course of offenders and their families: the PRISON PROJECT. The Prison Project is a joint project of the University of Leiden, the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR) and the University of Utrecht.

The Prison Project was initiated by Dr. Anja Dirkzwager (Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement) and prof. Dr. Paul Nieuwbeerta (Leiden University) and is funded by the Dutch Organization of Scientific Research (NWO), the NSCR and the Universities of Leiden and Utrecht. Alongside the project leaders, several senior-researchers, PhD-candidates, project managers and a large number of interviewers are collaborating on the project. Together, the research team aims to: (1) examine (how detainees experience) the conditions of confinement in The Netherlands, (2) study the effects of imprisonment on the life-course (social economic status, living situation, marriage and divorce, physical and mental health, social network and the wellbeing of partner and children) of ex-detainees, (3) study the effect of incarceration on future criminal behavior, and (4) examine factors that may explain the effects of imprisonment on life circumstances and criminal behavior.

To study this, we are following a group of almost 2,000 male prisoners during their time in detention and after release from prison. This (representative) sample consists of male offenders who processed through pre-trial detention between October 2010 and March 2011, are between the ages of 18 and 65, are born in the Netherlands, are held in pre-trial detention for a minimum of three weeks and are not suffering from a psychiatric disorder preventing them from participating in the study.

The project’s first wave of data collection--a structured interview and self-administered questionnaire--was conducted after respondents were imprisoned for about three weeks. Detainees who remained in prison were asked to fill out a questionnaire again at ten weeks, nine months and eighteen months after detention began.
When study participants were released from prison, they were interviewed again, the first time six months after they left prison, the second time 24 months post-release.

The Prison Project aims to study the effects of imprisonment on a variety of life-domains. Therefore, questions focused on a large number of topics, including various life domains (e.g., criminal behavior, employment, social networks, family formation and disruption and physical and mental health), their prison experience (such as prison regime, sentence length, disciplinary infractions and participation in rehabilitation programs) and a number of mediating factors (such as social capital, self-control, criminal attitudes and coping style). Additionally, data was gathered from several official registration sources, such as municipal registration, police registration, criminal record, penitentiary files and prison medical records.

The Prison Project’s longitudinal approach and extensive data collection yields a unique and rich dataset that provides a better understanding of the effects of imprisonment on the life circumstances of ex-detainees and their families as well as future criminal behavior.

Moreover, the Prison Project database provides excellent data to study the effects of prison-based treatment programs. Not only does it contain a plethora of information on rehabilitation program participants, it also provides a unique opportunity to consider a matched control-group of offenders who did not participate in treatment.

Anouk Bosma works as a PhD-candidate at the department of criminal law and criminology, Leiden University, The Netherlands. Her PhD-thesis focuses on the effects of a prison-based rehabilitation program. For questions concerning the Prison Project or the research on prison-based rehabilitation programs in The Netherlands, contact Anouk at a.q.bosma@law.leidenuniv.nl.

References


Hearing from the Experts: A Practitioner, A Participant and a Professor

By Stephanie Maass, Research Associate at ACE!, Kimberly Meyer and Catherine Salzinger, Graduate Research Assistants at ACE!

One way of understanding critical issues in corrections is to ask the “experts” their thoughts. We asked a practitioner, a participant, and a professor the same questions about implementing innovations.

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<th>PRACTITIONER</th>
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<td>Three key issues with implementing innovations:</td>
<td>1. Coordination/consistency with existing EBPs (timing, size/science, competing initiatives) 2. Ensuring coaching/practice is included 3. Having a plan (in advance) for measuring fidelity</td>
<td>1. Leadership and building broad support 2. Developing a plan that is supported by data 3. Quality assurance</td>
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<td>Worst current practice for implementing innovations:</td>
<td>Implementing innovation without sufficient preparation. This includes measuring capacity, training staff and/or adjusting current staff workloads to support integration of new tasks associated with implementing the innovation.</td>
<td>In my experience dealing with the parole/probation system, they don’t inform you. For example, when you get a new probation officer (PO), you build up camaraderie with one PO and then you go in to meet with them and you find out you have another PO. I find that to be troubling because you build up rapport and then you feel like you’re betrayed in a way. Also, they change a lot of rules and regulations that you don’t know about until it’s too late.</td>
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<td>Best current practice for implementing innovations:</td>
<td>The best practice for implementing innovations incorporates the inclusion of coaching, fidelity monitoring, and structures for regular feedback.</td>
<td>There are many, but probably just doing the same thing over and over again, even though it doesn’t seem to be working. For example, thinking you can just punish people out of their behavior or build your way out of a problem. Everybody wants a bigger jail or more presence, and yet we have 30 years of data saying that doesn’t work. We can’t afford it, and it is bad social policy.</td>
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<td>Your ideas on improving adoption of innovations:</td>
<td>The practice of adopting innovations can be improved by building better measures of fidelity into the innovation. While it is acknowledged that fidelity monitoring is important, it needs to be made more prominent in implementation plans for innovations.</td>
<td>You need to have people who are willing to take chances and challenge the status quo of using “feel good” measures based on tradition. That means being willing to look at the data, challenge staff and invest in training and coaching. Supervisors have to be willing to supervise and later evaluate [success levels for the innovations]. It’s about doing “what works.” To [practitioners], it’s innovative, but to [academics], it’s following the evidence. I don’t know of too many fields today that aren’t moving toward using more scientific evidence.</td>
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Three Community Corrections Supervisors (names withheld by request) Anonymous Probationer

Anonymous

Dr. Edward J. Latessa Professor and Director School of Criminal Justice, University of Cincinnati
Meet ACE’s New Team Members

Brandy Blasko - Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Brandy Blasko is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with a joint appointment at ACE! (Department of Criminology, Law, and Society) and the Human Emotions Research Lab (Department of Psychology). Brandy’s doctoral dissertation was titled *The Uncharted Influence of Prison Staff Decision Making*. Brandy’s research focuses on discretion and decision making in criminal justice. Brandy is also interested in developing empirical evidence for use in prison policies, translating sex offender research findings to policy, perceptions of treatment from the viewpoint of people who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated, and developing empirical evidence for use in gang prevention. Brandy graduated from Temple University in May 2013 with her Ph.D. in Criminal Justice. Brandy received her B.S. in Psychology and B.A. in Administration of Justice from the University of Pittsburgh and her M.A. in Forensic Psychology from John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

Julian Burke - Office Assistant
Julian Burke is a graduate student here at George Mason University, working toward his Master’s degree in Cognitive and Behavioral Neuroscience. He received his B.A. in Psychology from GMU in 2013. Julian is currently working as a research assistant under the direction of Dr. Ascoli at the Krasnow Institute. He has joined ACE! to assist Gina Rosch as an Office Assistant.

Lauren Duhaime - Graduate Research Assistant
Lauren Duhaime is working toward her master’s in Criminology, Law and Society. She received her B.A. in History with a Minor in Criminal Justice from Villanova University in 2010. Her research interests include juvenile delinquency, prevention, and offender reentry.

Kaitlyn Humphrey - Graduate Research Assistant
Kaitlyn Humphrey is currently working toward her master’s degree in Criminology, Law and Society and is a Graduate Research Assistant for ACE! Kaitlyn received her Bachelor’s in Sociology from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and was awarded Best Senior in the sociology department. Kaitlyn lived in Argentina for a semester and became fluent in Spanish. She has previous research experience working with prosecuting attorneys and currently is interested in crime hot spots, reentry, corrections, and social order among deviants.

Kresenda Keith - Volunteer
While pursuing her Ph.D part-time at Mason, Kresenda is employed as a Consortium Research Fellow, contracted to the U. S. Army Research Institute (ARI), Foundational Sciences Research Unit (FSRU), at Fort Belvoir, VA. At ARI, Kresenda assists the FSRU Chief, aids in the production and publication of contractor-associated reports, and participates in research projects related to institutional and organizational effectiveness within the Army. Kresenda’s main area of research is corrections—specifically, the effects of organizational factors and leadership in the correctional system. She enjoys exploring and disentangling the social and organizational processes that guide a separate prisoner-populated society within prison system. She also has been researching different forms of leadership styles in the correctional system and the impact on prison environment.
Meet ACE’s New Team Members

**Marissa Kiss - Research Associate**
Marissa Kiss, M.A., is a Research Associate at the Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence. She received her B.A. in Sociology from the University of Rhode Island in 2007 and earned her M.A. degree in Sociology from George Mason University in 2012. Prior to joining the ACE! team, Marissa worked at National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago for six years. Marissa’s primary research interests include offender reentry, community corrections, quantitative and qualitative research methods, and examining social inequality within the criminal justice system.

**Kimberly Meyer - Graduate Research Assistant**
Kimberly Meyer is a Ph.D. student in Criminology, Law and Society. She hails from Wisconsin, where she studied secondary education before moving to DC in pursuit of her master’s in Public Administration from American University. Before coming to Mason, Kimberly published a white paper for the National Council for Public-Private Partnerships and presented research at the European Society of Criminology’s 2012 Annual Conference in Bilbao, Spain. In the future, she hopes to return to teaching while using research to inform policy in the areas of juvenile justice, corrections, and sentencing.

**Catherine Salzinger - Graduate Research Assistant**
Catherine Salzinger is a doctoral student in the Criminology, Law and Society program at George Mason University. She received her M.A. in Criminal Justice from John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Prior to joining ACE! as a Graduate Research Assistant, Catherine was awarded a German Chancellor Fellowship (2011-2012) from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation to conduct research on Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM) in Germany. Her research interests include juvenile justice reform, therapeutic jurisprudence and specialized courts, and restorative justice.

**Heather Toronjo - Research Assistant**
Heather Toronjo is a Research Assistant at ACE! and a masters student at George Mason’s School of Public Policy. She received her B.A. in Anthropology from Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. Her research interests include the development of corrections policy, offender reentry programs, corrections workforce professional development, the implementation of evidence based practices, and community corrections.
ACE’s New Undergraduate Research Assistants

Audrey Hine - Senior at George Mason

Why did you join ACE?!: I am extremely interested in conducting hands-on research to gain a better understanding of the work involved in graduate school. I am also excited to learn more about corrections, prisons, probation, and parole, as these are topics. I have not come across in much detail in any of my prior classes.

What will you be working on in your research with ACE!!: I will be coding case note files for the MDPP project, beta testing a smart phone application for the YOURS project, and developing presentations for the RNR project.

One thing you hope to learn at ACE!!: I have some experience working with quantitative research projects, so I am most excited to learn more about qualitative research projects.

What are your future plans?: I intend on pursuing a master’s degree in Criminology, possibly at George Mason University, as well as starting my career in the criminal justice field, either with a government agency, or in a civilian capacity with a law enforcement agency.

Stacey Nelson- Freshman at George Mason

Why did you join ACE?!: I’m majoring in Criminology so it was a miracle that I was able to join the ACE! team for my federal work study job. As soon as I saw my acceptance/offer letter, I jumped on the opportunity. Not only will I be able to work closely with top-notch criminology researchers, but I will also be able to acquire my own set of special skills throughout the school year that I can later apply in real life or even my academic studies.

What will you be working on in your research with ACE!!: I will be working on the Prison Mental Health project with Dr. Brandy Blasko, primarily helping her with data analysis. I will also be working on the RNR project, helping with a literature search on juvenile justice articles and coding articles into a database, and the MDPSCS project, which entails helping to code field notes.

One thing you hope to learn at ACE!!: I mainly want to learn how to do proper research. In class we do research papers all the time, but I feel as if my researching methods are a bit weak in comparison to others in my class.

What are your future plans?: I’m not really sure what I want to be just yet. I know that the Criminology field is the one for me and hopefully after participating in ACE!, I’ll have a better idea of where I fit in and what I’m best at.

Matt Rusinak- Junior at George Mason

Why did you join ACE?!: I am working towards a Degree in Criminology with a concentration in Homeland Security and hopefully a double minor. I joined ACE! because I think it is very interesting and relevant to my career choice to get some experience with research and some fieldwork. I think it presents a very interesting opportunity for me to learn a lot about how research works and ways to ensure accurate results.

What will you be working on in your research with ACE!!: I will be working on MDPSCS coding and the YOURS project. I will also be working on general proof reading and editing.

One thing you hope to learn at ACE!!: I hope to learn a lot about the processes and interactions between researchers and participants.

What are your future plans?: Once I am done with my internship at ACE! I plan to look into interning with local law enforcement and then possibly with a government department.

Gina Salinas- Freshman at George Mason

Why did you join ACE?!: My main reason for joining ACE! was because I am a Criminology major and my new position at ACE! will deal mainly with research into the field of Criminology. It will give depth to the things I will be learning this semester, too.

What will you be working on in your research with ACE!!: I’ll be working on the MAPIT project which focuses mainly on tracking parole clients, as well as the SOARING2 project. I’m very excited to start my research on both.

One thing you hope to learn at ACE!!: I hope to improve on my skills as a researcher while at ACE! since that is something I struggled with in high school while writing research papers. I hope to learn more about the criminology field and what it’s all about.

What are your future plans?: I’m hoping to go to graduate school and become a lawyer later on.


Wooditch, A., Tang, L., & Taxman, F.S. (Forthcoming). Which criminogenic need changes are most important in promoting desistance from crime and substance use? *Criminal Justice and Behavior*. 

ACE! Director, Faye Taxman, is now the Editor-in-Chief of the new journal *Health & Justice* by SpringerOpen
Awards

Dr. Taxman to receive the Warren and Palmer Differential Intervention Award & the Distinguished Scholar Award

Dr. Faye Taxman has received the Marguerite Q. Warren and Ted B. Palmer Differential Intervention Award from the American Society of Criminology Division on Corrections and Sentencing. This award is given to a researcher, scholar, practitioner, or other individual who has significantly advanced the understanding, teaching, or implementation of classification, differential assignment, or differential approaches designed to promote improved social and personal adjustment and long-term change among juvenile and adult offenders. The award focuses on interventions, and on ways of implementing them that differ from “one-size-fits-all,” “one-size-largely-fits all,” or “almost fits all,” approaches.

From the ASC Division of Corrections & Sentencing, Dr. Taxman will also be presented with the Distinguished Scholar Award (she previously won this award in 2008). This award recognizes a lasting scholarly career, with particular emphasis on a ground-breaking contribution (e.g., book or series of articles) in the past 5 years. The award’s committee considered both research in the area of corrections and sentencing and service to the Division. Both awards will be presented at the Annual Business Meeting and Awards Breakfast at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, November 21, 8:00 - 9:20 am.

GRA Jill Viglione receives Honorable Mention from Division on Corrections and Sentencing’s Dissertation Scholarship Award committee

The Division on Corrections and Sentencing’s Dissertation Scholarship Award committee unanimously supported an honorable mention for ACE! GRA, Jill Viglione’s proposal, “Transportability of Evidence-Based Treatments in Virginia.” Viglione will receive an official certificate from the DCS acknowledging this honorable mention and will collect a certificate and be acknowledged in person during the annual meeting and breakfast that takes place during the American Society of Criminology’s Annual Conference. This year’s breakfast meeting is scheduled for November 21, 8:00 - 9:20am, International C, International Level in the Marriott in Atlanta.

GRA Jill Viglione to receive the Dean’s Challenge Award

In May, ACE! GRA Jill Viglione was acknowledged at the Criminology, Law & Society Award Ceremony for winning the Dean’s Challenge Award (pictured right with Dr. Danielle Rudes). The Dean’s Challenge Fellowship was established in 2007 to acknowledge exceptional graduate students who have excelled while making academically-challenging choices. The recipients of this award receive a fellowship to help with their educational expenses. The Dean’s Challenge is funded by generous donations from friends of the college. She will receive the award this fall an awards dinner with President and Provost.

GRA Lincoln Sloas accepted into the Preparing for Careers in the Academy Program

ACE! GRA Lincoln Sloas has been accepted into the Preparing for Careers in the Academy Program, sponsored by the Office of the Provost and the Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence at George Mason University. The program’s purpose is to help PhD students and MFA students in those fields in which this is the terminal degree to prepare for future academic careers and to strengthen their instructional effectiveness. The program runs from August 2013—May 2014.
Recent Activity

Director Faye Taxman on C-SPAN: Housing for Former Inmates
Washington, DC, March 2013

Director Faye Taxman was recently a guest on C-SPAN, March 25, 2013, where she talked about halfway houses, the reentry housing centers for former inmates. Dr. Taxman detailed concerns over lax regulation of the homes and other problems, and she also responded to telephone calls and electronic communications. You can watch the full interview on C-SPAN’s website: http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/311703-5.

ACE! GRAs Joseph Durso & Victoria Goldberg Complete Master’s Program
Fairfax, VA, May 2013

ACE! GRAs Joseph Durso and Victoria Goldberg came into the Criminology, Law & Society program together and have been office-mates at ACE! since. They both happily graduated with their Master’s degrees this spring. Tori is continuing on to the PhD program at George Mason and Joe has begun his doctoral work at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. They really appreciated the support and guidance of Dr. Taxman and Dr. Rudes throughout the process.

ACE! Presents at Law & Society Association Meetings
Boston, MA, May 2013

Six members of ACE! presented at the 2013 Law & Society Association Meetings held at the Boston Sheraton in Boston, MA, May 30 - June 2. The theme of this year’s meetings was “Power, Privilege, and the Pursuit of Justice: Legal Challenges in Precarious Times.” Pictured to the right, GRA Victoria Goldberg presents on the role middle managers play in a community corrections department during and after an organization-wide change. This is part of a project evaluating the effectiveness of management training on middle managers in a mid-Atlantic state’s community corrections office. Pictured far right, Drs. Rudes and Portillo with famed scholar, Michael Lipsky, who wrote Street Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service (1908/2010) and Dr. Elizabeth Chiarello, Assistant Professor of Sociology at St. Louis University.
Advanced Qualitative Methods Training for CJDATS
Fairfax, VA, June 2013

The Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence! Deputy Director Danielle Rudes and Graduate Research Assistant Jill Viglione hosted a qualitative analysis workshop June 15th from 10 am – 3 pm. The workshop covered advanced techniques used to analyze data and how to write qualitative research studies. The training was held in the GMU TV studio in Innovation Hall and was recorded. If you are interested in seeing the workshop’s video recording, please contact Dr. Rudes directly at drudes@gmu.edu.

An ACE! Baby Shower
Fairfax, VA, September 2013

The women of ACE! gathered for a baby shower to celebrate the upcoming arrival of ACE!’s newest member this past September. ACE!’s Program Manager, Gina Rosch, is expecting a baby girl in November. Gina feels so lucky to have such a supportive and generous group of co-workers!

Deputy Director Danielle Rudes and Postdoc Brandy Blasko Visit Louisiana State Penitentiary
Angola, LA, September 2013

As part of a collaborative relationship between ACE! and the Prison Fellowship (www.prisonfellowship.org) ACE! Deputy Director, Danielle S. Rudes and Postdoctoral Fellow Dr. Brandy Blasko traveled to Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola in September, 2013. The trip’s primary goal was to get an overview of some of the “best practices” Warden Burl Cain and his staff use to reform and assist inmates (mostly lifers) in this world renowned facility. The whirlwind trip featured a tour of much of the 18,000+ acre prison complex including the dog training camp, horse/mule barn, old and new death row and the prison museum and gift shop. Danielle and Brandy also spent the day driving around the compound observing inmates and correctional staff at work in the many acres of fruits and vegetables that feed the inmates at this facility and five other Louisiana state prisons. At Warden Cain’s invitation, Danielle and Brandy ate both lunch and dinner at the Ranch House on the prison grounds. The meals consisted of food grown and produced on Angola’s property and prepared and served by inmates—including our favorite, Big Lou. Danielle and Brandy also interviewed several staff members, another researcher doing a historical project and a Warden. Visiting Angola was a dream-come-true for two prison enthusiasts, Brandy and Danielle. They took away from the experience knowledge and understanding that will help them plan studies and programs for prisons and community corrections agencies into the future.

Pictured above, Brandy Blasko and Danielle Rudes at the main gate of the Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola.
ACE! Presentations

Recent Presentations


Goldberg, V. (2013, June). Normative issues to address while implementing evidence-based practice. Presented at the Law and Society Association Annual Conference, Boston, MA.


Women Conference, sponsored by the University of Rochester Medical Center’s Women’s Initiative Supporting Health and the university’s Susan B. Anthony Center for Women’s Leadership, Rochester, NY.


Taxman, F.S. (2013, August). *RNR Simulation Tool.* Presented at the Georgia Department of Corrections, Atlanta, GA.


**Upcoming Presentations**

Blasko, B. & Taxman, F. (2013, October). *Understanding substance use disorders and their relationship to sexual offending, treatment and client outcomes.* Pre-conference seminar provided at the Annual Research and Treatment Conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, Chicago, IL.

Blasko, B. (2013, November). *Prison decision making: The process by which prison staff formulate recommendations for release.* Paper to be presented at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

ACE! Director, Faye Taxman, presented the opening plenary talk at the American Probation and Parole Association’s summer institute held in Baltimore, MD in July.

The talk focused on the potential new directions that the probation and parole fields have available while highlighting the role new technologies can play in the future.
Hutzell, K. & Sloas, L.B. (2013, November). *What do we know about crime and place research in the classroom?: An exploratory study.* To be presented at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

Lerch, J., Rodriguez, M., Walters, S.T., & Taxman, F.S. (2013, October). *Commitment Level to Treatment and Probation: A Preliminary Analysis of MAPIT.* Poster to be presented at the Addiction Health Services Research Conference (AHSR), Portland, OR.

Lerch, J., & Taxman, F.S. (2013, November). *MAPIT: An Automated Tool to Help Motivate Offenders.* To be presented at the American Society of Criminology annual conference (ASC), Atlanta, GA.


Murphy, A., Mbaba, M, Wooditch, A., & Taxman, F.S. (2013, November). *Predicting Compliance with Medication Regimens among Justice-involved Opioid Users.* To be presented at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.


Sloas, L.B. & Taxman, F.S. (2013, November). *Assessing the use of automated technologies and its adaptability to criminal justice populations.* To be presented at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.


Viglione, J., Rudes, D., Taxman, F., & Goldberg, V. (2013, November). *Changing Probation: Implementing Evidence-Based Risk Assessments at the Street Level.* To be presented at the American Society of Criminology, Atlanta, GA.
Criminology, Law & Society at George Mason University

The Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence (ACE!) is part of the Department of Criminology, Law, & Society (CLS) in the College of Humanities and Sciences at George Mason University. As a university center, we know that one of our key roles is to develop and encourage the talent of junior researchers. Graduate students in the Department work on ACE! projects as project managers, data collectors, analysts, and writers. They are able to get outside the classroom and hone their skills while contributing to the field. In addition to working with students, we often collaborate with other research centers and faculty both in the CLS department and across other disciplines.

The Department of Criminology, Law and Society is a dynamic, interdisciplinary unit. The faculty includes some of the nation’s top researchers in the field. Graduate and undergraduate students have the opportunity to work closely with these outstanding faculty in courses and on research projects. As they graduate, students go on to work in the area’s top federal agencies, law schools, and doctoral programs.

Students at the graduate and undergraduate level develop strong foundations in research, methods, theories and systems of justice, criminology and crime policy, law and society, and justice. They graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to understand the causes and consequences of crime and injustice, the responses by criminal and civil justice institutions, and what works to improve social conditions among affected individuals, communities, organizations, and countries. For more information, visit: cls.gmu.edu.

ACE! has Moved!

ACE! officially moved to our new office space in the Commerce Building nearby George Mason’s Fairfax Campus. We are located on the 4th floor. Our new address is:

4087 University Drive, Suite 4100
Mail Stop 6D3
Fairfax, Virginia 22030

Upcoming Events

Upcoming Field trip:
ACE! Prison Trip to Pennsylvania to tour the State Correctional Institution at Graterford and the State Correctional Institution at Chester.
November 8th (all day)

Upcoming Film Screening:
OAR Film Screening, “The House I Live In”
ACE! is partnering with Offender Aid & Restoration (OAR) & the Arlington Reentry Council Faith-Based Collaborative, a subcommittee of the Arlington Reentry Council, to host a film screening at George Mason’s Arlington campus. The film, “The House I Live In,” is a fantastic documentary about the failed War on Drugs and the disastrous effect it has had on certain segments of society. A panel discussion will follow the film, which will include several of OAR’s clients.
January 7, 2014
5pm - 9pm
The Auditorium in Founders Hall on George Mason’s Arlington Campus