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.

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Current ACE! Projects

DFE: Desistance Second Chance Act
Evidence Based Community Supervision: Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services
Fairfax Juvenile Probation Project
Implementing Advanced Evidence Based Practices in Virginia’s Community Corrections System
MAPIT: Motivational Assistance Program to Initiate Treatment
Philadelphia SMART Probation
The Prison Project (PA-DOC)
Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) Simulation Tool
RNR Delaware
RNR-SAMHSA Re-entry
RNR Santa Cruz
STRIDE: Seek/Test/Treat: HIV, Buprenorphine, and Criminal Justice
STRIDE: Seek/Test/Retain: PLWA and Opioid Users in Washington, DC
SOARING 2: eLearning System to Support RNR Principles
SOARING 2 City of New York
SOARING 2 Hidalgo County
Solano County Probation EBP Assessment
YOURS: Demonstration Project of Your Own Reentry System

Advancing Practice

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

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An Introduction to Fidelity by Laurie Robinson

Fidelity is a critical issue for criminal justice organizations to consider, and few would dispute that sustaining fidelity over time is a tremendous challenge. In particular, how does an organization maintain adherence to fidelity over the longer haul? The answer lies in broader issues surrounding organizational capacity, the quality of leadership in the organization, the quality of supervision, and the type of people assigned to implement the program. Because of my history heading the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, I look at fidelity not only as it pertains to corrections programs, but also more broadly about how it affects justice agencies and policies across policing, juvenile justice, and courts. In a country of enormous diversity (e.g., 18,000 state and local law enforcement agencies in rural, tribal, suburban and urban settings) it is important to have a mechanism for discussing fidelity across justice agencies that recognizes the need for some flexibility to respond to local mores and cultures without abandoning core content and principles of evidence-based programs and approaches; a mechanism that recognizes “real world” situations and is flexible enough to adapt to them. We also must find ways to address the gap between researchers and practitioners that prevents greater implementation of science-based approaches.

To adequately address fidelity issues across diverse settings, it is important to identify the key principles to be implemented. There are a host of good practices associated with fidelity, many of which have been advanced by ACE! over recent years. These include training – that has been carefully vetted and tested – provided to program staff and to supervisors; tools like checklists, treatment manuals, toll-free assistance numbers, websites to consult; and ongoing technical assistance. In addition, having both quantitative and qualitative assessments of implementation can help assure fidelity is being achieved and provide researchers and practitioners with a deeper understanding of the challenges in implementing research-based programs in “real world” settings.

Ultimately, if we care about bringing about real change in organizations over the long term (rather than only during the course of a research project), then staff buy-in is critical. In my experience, engaging staff (and unions, where they exist) in change processes is critical to promoting sustainability. At its base, the overall management “health” of the organization is key. For example, are organizational leaders committed to open communication, including constructive criticism? Do they draw middle managers into the decision-making process? This type of setting, backed by training and evidence-based protocols, has a strong chance of implementing a program or practice with fidelity and sustaining it by embedding it in the agency’s culture and way of doing business.

The current issue of ACE!’s Advancing Practice takes a closer look at many of these key issues regarding fidelity. ACE! researchers and partners examine the use of translational tools to bridge research and practice, work with middle managers to increase adherence to evidence-based protocols within agencies and build sustainability over time, and use a range of qualitative and quantitative approaches to further examine and understand what influences fidelity in corrections agencies.
Defining and Measuring Fidelity with the RNR Simulation Tool

By Amy Murphy, Research Associate at ACE!

The Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence! (ACE!), in partnership with the University of Massachusetts-Lowell, Maxarth, LLC., and Slonky, LLC, developed the RNR Suite of Tools with the goal of bringing the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) framework to criminal justice practitioners, treatment providers, and policymakers in the form of easy-to-use web-based tools. Adherence to the RNR framework means 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). Jurisdictions can benefit from these tools by classifying and assessing treatment programs for quality and then matching criminal justice clients to the treatment they need.

The RNR Program Tool for Adults (“Program Tool”), one of three portals within the suite, asks program managers to answer a series of questions about a given program and then, based on those responses, classifies programs into one of six categories. The Program Tool also provides a score and feedback in six domains: risk, need, responsivity, implementation, dosage, and restrictiveness, as well as a total score. The largest of these domains in the Program Tool is implementation, where the Tool assesses the features of the operation of the program, including staff credentials, quality assurance measures, communication with justice system partners, use of a manual for consistent service delivery, and fidelity assessments. Research indicates these features are important to ensure programs are implemented with fidelity to maximize effectiveness (Smith, Gendreau, & Swartz, 2009; Taxman & Belenko, 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Tool question</th>
<th>How it relates to fidelity monitoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the credentials of the staff who run the program?</td>
<td>Depending on the type of program, staff may need certain educational (e.g., MSW, MD, etc.) or professional background (e.g., experience with substance-abusing clients) to run the program with fidelity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is/was the program evaluated?</td>
<td>A robust program evaluation will include measures of fidelity to the treatment model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does a treatment manual guide the program?</td>
<td>Monitoring fidelity to a model cannot occur without a model!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What techniques are used to ensure the program is of the highest quality (measure quality assurance)?</td>
<td>These can include observations, audits, and/or recording of sessions for assessment of fidelity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you know the program is being delivered with fidelity?</td>
<td>This is a free text field that gives programs the opportunity to reflect on and assert how they monitor different aspects of their programs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Program Tool incorporates several questions that address fidelity, including staff qualifications, staff training in program curricula and implementation, percentage of each curriculum used, evaluations, observations, and use of a treatment manual. See table above for more information on how these questions address program fidelity. In addition, some RNR jurisdictions implement program observations as part of the process. These
observations can use various definitions of fidelity, such as fidelity to the curriculum or program manual, fidelity to how the program is described in the Program Tool, or fidelity based on a checklist developed by the program. What happens before and after the observations is equally important as the observations themselves. It is vital to know in advance what you should expect to see in the program. For example, you cannot conduct fidelity monitoring on a Thinking for Change program without basic knowledge about what a criminal thinking/cognitive restructuring program should address. Additionally, observations should have in place a feedback loop: the observers communicate findings to the facilitators in order to address any issues or concerns. It is also imperative to remember that flexibility is crucial in treatment programs—a facilitator may need to go “off track” if participants have pressing issues to address.

To learn more about the RNR Program Tool or the other tools in the RNR suite and to test-drive them, visit: http://www.gmuace.org/tools/index.php

References:


The Next Generation of Prison Research

By Drs. Brandy Blasko & Faye S. Taxman, Post Doctoral Researcher & Director of ACE!

In recent years legitimacy of justice organizations—the belief that justice organizations are entitled to make decisions about and should be deferred to in justice matters—is a major theme in criminal justice research (Paternoster et al., 1997; Reisig & Mesko, 2009; Tyler, 2006a). This scholarship relies principally on threads of procedural justice—the notion that internalized attitudes and judgments about institutions and procedures drive behavior (which is contrary to an instrumental approach that assumes people are driven by the prospects of rewards and punishments) (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). In this regard, legitimacy is framed as “a concept meant to capture the beliefs that bolster willing obedience” (Levi, Sacks, & Tyler, 2009, p. 354). Therefore, it is not surprising that a majority of legitimacy studies examine police-citizen interactions and explore the extent that people are willing to obey the law (Tyler, 2006b) (though a handful of studies on legitimacy have occurred in the courts). Findings from these studies show individuals are more likely to accept the decisions made by police when they perceive an interaction as fair (Tyler, 2006a), when they are allowed to communicate and provide their own side of the situation (Dai et al., 2011), and when they are treated with dignity and respect (Mastrofski, Snipes, & Supina, 1996), concluding perceived procedural justice drives perceived legitimacy.

Intuitively then, it makes sense that themes of legitimacy and procedural justice are important in prisons as safety and order—two crucial components of prison life—are likely improved when staff and prisoners perceive the institution as a legitimate system (Beijersbergen et al., 2013; Liebling & Maruna, 2013; Reisig & Mesko, 2009). As such, penologists have recently turned to the idea of legitimacy as a mechanism of achieving social order in prisons. Unlike police-citizen interactions, however, prison staff-prisoner interactions are ongoing and long term. When prisoners maintain and follow the orders of staff they may be doing so for secondary gains, such as earning valued early release or obtaining favors from staff. In other words, social order could be masquerading as legitimacy—prisoners who are compliant may still not perceive the prison system as legitimate.

The day-to-day prison culture is a relatively under-researched aspect of criminal justice scholarship with far-reaching implications for custodial and prisoner reentry outcomes. Little is known about how prison staff-prisoner interactions and prisoner perceptions and experiences in the larger prison context facilitate or impede prisoner behavior and change during custody and post-release (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012). The next generation of prison research should focus on identifying relatively inexpensive and easy-to-implement in-prison strategies (for example, non-programmatic factors) to improve in-prison and post-release success (e.g., examine how prison staff and prisoners perceive, understand, and negotiate formal and informal aspects of the prison environment; assess factors associated with changes in how prison staff and prisoners perceive, understand, and negotiate the prison environment over time.

References
Monitoring Fidelity to Improve Outcomes: Fairfax Juvenile & Adult Probation

By Kimberly Meyer & Kaitlyn Humphrey, Graduate Research Assistants at ACE!

As part of an effort to use more evidence-based practices (EBPs) in probation and residential treatment, the Court Services Unit (CSU) for Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court partnered with ACE! to learn more about how agency staff adopt these practices. The CSU believes that consistent use of EBPs such as motivational interviewing (MI) and risk assessment instruments will promote positive behavior change in juveniles while also reducing Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC), a nationally recognized problem that each state must address, as required by the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. Administrators hope the use of EBPs and this study of fidelity will help them more fully realize their agency-wide philosophy of trying to spark behavior change in clients rather than relying upon monitoring and supervision to manage existing behaviors.

This project will provide the CSU with initial answers to the question of whether the adoption of EBPs has influenced probation and residential staffs’ routine practices. Researchers at ACE! use qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observation, to learn what CSU staff do, how they interact with their clients, and what they think about the new practices.

During study year one, the use of MI was of primary interest. ACE! Deputy Director Danielle S. Rudes and ACE! Research Associate Courtney Porter noticed a pattern emerging from collected data that they call “Motivational Drift” wherein probation officers begin interactions with clients using MI techniques – usually open-ended questions – but drift away from MI when they intersperse non-MI techniques in conversations and/or use non-MI techniques more regularly.

ACE! researchers also developed a performance report card for the agency to consider within the context of a broader Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) process. The draft report card is part of a larger plan to help the agency improve fidelity. The report card should aid peer teams in monitoring progress toward proficiency in MI and identify areas in need of improvement. The CSU hopes that the PDSA process will allow staff members to take ownership over fidelity by finalizing the report card to better meet their needs and then using it with staff to assess outcomes and make necessary changes. ACE! staff will continue to monitor the quality improvement process to understand whether line staff skillsets improve following performance enhancement measures.

Though CSU administrators recognize the importance of fidelity, they try not to dwell too much on this point, for fear of stifling line workers’ individual styles of working with clients. If staff members commit to and understand the reasons for using this approach to assessment and treatment, administrators believe EBPs will benefit their agency and fidelity will occur over time.
Philadelphia’s Smart Probation Grant and the Future of Fidelity

By Heather Toronjo, Research Assistant at ACE!

The headquarters of the Philadelphia Adult Probation and Parole Department (APPD) at 1401 Arch Street casts an impressive silhouette against the Philadelphia skyline. The early 1920’s architecture of the massive 14-story edifice contrasts starkly with the buzz of innovation contained within. Under the guidance of Dr. Ellen Kurtz, Director of Research, and with the enthusiastic support of Chief Probation and Parole Officer, Charlie Hoyt, the department continually strives to incorporate the latest research to improve offender outcomes and maintain public safety. To accomplish its mission to protect the community by intervening in the lives of offenders, the APPD uses a mix of enforcement and treatment strategies to help offenders transition into productive, law-abiding citizens. Working within the all-too-familiar budget constraints of a community corrections agency, the department regularly looks for ways to maximize resources without sacrificing their mission. In this vein, APPD prioritized the need to identify and address the criminogenic needs of moderate- to high-risk offenders. In 2013, APPD applied for and won a Smart Probation grant offered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Smart Probation grant provides funding to agencies to develop evidence-based probation practices that effectively address probationer needs and reduce recidivism. As a grantee of a 2013 Smart Probation grant, APPD now has the opportunity to develop procedures to improve outcomes for the tens of thousands of probationers and parolees that cycle through their doors each year.

Working with Dr. Faye Taxman at George Mason University’s ACE! and Dr. Steve Belenko of Temple University, APPD recently began the exciting three-year journey to implement evidence-based practices in treatment matching. The project has several components to increase the department’s fidelity to the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model and other evidence-based supervision practices. All APPD staff will complete the SOARING 2 curriculum developed by ACE! to assist staff in building knowledge and skills related to evidence-based supervision practices. The eLearning system is a translational tool designed to help bridge the gap between research and practice. SOARING 2 participants are trained using RNR, motivation and engagement, case planning, problem solving and desistance. The process incorporates coaches who conduct observations and provide feedback to officers on skill use. To assist with treatment matching, the department is currently piloting the Assess an Individual Tool, developed by ACE! as a possible needs assessment tool for the department. This tool uses offender risk and need data to calculate treatment recommendations with the goal of reducing offenders’ propensity to reoffend. The department also set out to identify the best services in Philadelphia for their supervision clients. To assist in this mission, APPD will have treatment programs complete the RNR Program Tool for Adults developed by ACE! The tool evaluates programs with the aim of improving service through increased fidelity to the Risk-Need-Responsivity principle, core correctional practices and appropriate dosage, content, staff, and curriculum proven effective for the specific type of programming offered. Finally, to further ensure fidelity to evidence-based practices, APPD will manage offender compliance via JSTEPS, a web-based case planning and behavioral contract tool. JSTEPS uses evidence-based Contingency Management practices and adapts them for supervision.

As APPD incorporates SOARING 2, Assess an Individual, RNR Program Tool for Adults, and JSTEPS, Dr. Belenko will work with APPD staff to set up tracking databases for performance measures.

The excitement and dedication of Chief Hoyt, Dr. Kurtz, and all of the APPD team adds an optimistic spirit important to the success of any project. The ACE! team is excited about the opportunity to advance fidelity within community corrections with our fantastic partners at the APPD.
Adhering to Motivational Interviewing: MAPIT’s use of the Motivational Interview Treatment Integrity Coding System

By Teneshia Thurman & Elizabeth Ressler, LGSW, GRA & Counselor at ACE!

Motivational interviewing (MI) is an empirically supported client-centered intervention that targets behavioral change by helping clients resolve ambivalence (Madson & Campbell, 2006). The MAPIT (Motivational Assessment Program to Initiate Treatment) study utilizes MI in its intervention. To ensure fidelity, Dr. Scott Walters trained counselors and conducted practice sessions prior to the start of the intervention. During the intervention, Dr. Walters meets with the counselors to discuss concerns and provide feedback on their audiotaped sessions. Then, the audiotapes are coded using the Motivational Interview Treatment Integrity (MITI 3.1; Moyers, Martin, Manuel, Miller, & Ernst, 2009) coding system. The MITI is a behavioral coding system designed to provide structured feedback to improve the practice of MI in non-research settings and as a treatment integrity measure in clinical trials of MI (Moyers, Martin, Manuel, Miller, & Ernst, 2009). Using the MITI to code MI sessions ensures that MI is conducted and assesses how well the counselor adheres to MI throughout the client session.

The MITI measures the interviewer’s/clinician’s behavior within two areas: the global scores and behavior counts. When the coder codes the global score s/he is assessing their overall impression of how well the clinician adhered to the scale. The global ratings consist of five different sections: evocation, collaboration, autonomy/support, direction, and empathy. The coder also scores the clinician in each area on a five-point scale, 1=low and 5=high. All interviewers start at a 3 and either move up or down on the scale. The MITI manual provides benchmarks for MI adherence at each point level in each global category. It is up to the rater to determine the score for each dimension based on the benchmarks. The interviewer receives five global scores and one global spirit score. The global spirit score is the average score for evocation, collaboration, and autonomy/support.

The global scores are a reflection of the holistic nature of the interviewer whereas the behavioral counts are simply counts/tallies of interviewer’s behavior. To code behavior counts the coder must parse the interviewer’s speech into utterances, which are complete thought. When one thought ends the utterance is complete and when a new thought begins a new utterance starts. The behavior counts are broken up into five different sections and an utterance may receive one of the five behavioral codes: Giving Information, MIA, MINA, Questions (open or closed) and reflections (complex or simple). The MIA, or MI Adherent codes refers to the interviewer talking to the client in a way that is consistent with the spirit of MI. For example, asking a client for permission before giving advice or emphasizing the client’s control. MINA, or MI Non-Adherent, refers to the interviewer talking with the client in a way that does not support the spirit of MI like giving advice without permission or confronting the client. Often, the interviewer will ask either open or closed questions or reflect on what the client said. Simple reflections are when the interviewer repeats back to the client what they have said (this can include a verbatim reflection). Complex reflections are used to add to what the client has said. This often includes getting at the emotion the client is feeling although they might not have previously stated it. The MITI manual provides many examples and decision rules to help coders determine proper behavioral codes.

Dr. Walters put together a group of research assistants to code MI sessions utilizing the MITI. During each round of coding each group member is responsible for coding five tapes—one of which is a common tape. The members of the group do not know which tape is the common tape until they meet to discuss the coding. Having a common tape is favorable because it helps with inter-rater reliability. As a way to help with this process, group member Stephanie Spohr modified the MITI coding sheet to code the behavior counts within five-minute segments. The group decided to code within five-minute segments to create an easier way to pinpoint discrepancies and listen for areas of concern.
Using the MITI as a fidelity tool not only provides information as to whether MI is taking place, but also if it is conducted at a minimum level. For example, beginning proficiency for global scores is an average of 3.5, whereas competency is an average of 4. Sessions with 40% complex reflection are considered beginner proficiency and 50% reflects competency. By using the MITI, researchers can assess whether the structured MI sessions are transferable to other interventions and whether certain global scores or behavior counts lead to favorable client outcomes. This is important for future interventions that use MI, because it allows the MAPIT research team to provide information as to what type of interviewer behavior leads to more or less favorable client outcomes.

MITI Coding Sheet (Sample)

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<th>Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity Code (MITI) Coding Sheet Revised 1/21/2014</th>
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<td><strong>Tape:</strong> BD00145 MI-1</td>
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**Behavior Counts**

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**References**


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

By Kimberly S. Meyer and Catherine Salzinger, Graduate Research Assistants at ACE!, and Connor Monahan, Undergraduate Research Assistant 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 similar questions about fidelity in practice.

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<th>PRACTITIONER</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jamie McCarron</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Dr. John H. Laub</td>
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<td>Director, Probation Services</td>
<td>male jail inmate</td>
<td>Distinguished University Professor</td>
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<td>Fairfax County Juvenile &amp; Domestic Relations District Court</td>
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<td>Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice</td>
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Three key issues with program fidelity:
1. **History**: staff members’ previous experience influences their use of new methods
2. **Readiness for change**: buy-in from line staff
3. **Sustainability**: resources that allow for ongoing training and maintenance

They do a really good job with the addiction program at this jail and its structure is implemented well. They have people who evaluate your mental health and talk to you individually about your past to help figure out your issues. The education courses are done three times a week and then they have group counseling three times a week after that. The counselors meet with a couple people from their group after each counseling session, so most people get seen individually by a counselor once a week. The counselors here are really great and really intelligent.

1. **Properly testing** an idea if it has not been properly implemented
2. **Understanding varying program effects**
3. **Understanding the unintended consequences** of an intervention

Worst current practice for ensuring fidelity:
After implementing something new, the initial feedback should not be negative. Folks should acknowledge that it takes time to incorporate new practices into daily work and refine them, and emphasize that continuous improvement is the key to fidelity.

There was nothing I didn’t like. All the different aspects helped me learn different things about my addiction and showed me why I need to change.

There is a tendency after a positive finding for others to want to replicate quickly, but with a fast and cheap solution. Scaling up or replicating quickly and cheaply without any real thought and training is a problem.

Best current practice for ensuring fidelity:
Our best tool has been the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) process. This allows staff to find solutions to the problems they see when implementing new practices. We have used booster sessions and peer-to-peer evaluations to encourage ongoing refinement of new evidence-based skills.

The teachers are really great. They are very knowledgeable and know how to simplify the language so that everyone understands what they’re talking about. They do a good job getting the message across.

I think David Olds’ (Ph.D.) work with the Nurse-Family Partnership National Service Office is a good example. They have an office that was developed after their initial site study that oversees implementation. This makes me think -- Where is there ownership of implementation within criminal justice? I think one potential strategy would be to first use the NIJ to generate research evidence. Then, we could involve multiple site replication studies in conjunction with the BJA, who would then be responsible for...
Your ideas on improving fidelity and making sure organizations are doing what they intend to do:

- It is important to make sure staff are committed to the underlying philosophy of the agency and understand why we value fidelity. That buy-in leads to consistency but also allows people to use best practices in ways that match their personal styles. Promoting self-monitoring and staff ownership of fidelity is very important, and the PSDA process has been our answer to that.

- The formatting for this program is very good. I think they are doing everything the correct way. I would have my program be the same as this. I would make sure that the teaching is done the same because teaching is key, as well as putting out the right information. I also like how they bring in a nurse practitioner to tell us how the chemicals in our drugs actually affect different parts of our organs. I think that’s very important. I don’t think I could improve this program.

- We need to do a better job of data collection in terms of the implementation process (dosage, clientele, organizational capacity, etc.). In addition, I think our theories about programming are very weak. I think we need to begin to ask why does a program work, and if it does work, what are the underlying mechanisms that make this program effective?

*Because the concept of program fidelity is challenging for participants to understand, we modified the interview questions to address issues of fidelity without using academic language about evidence-based practice. This inmate discussed a drug treatment program in which he participated, but we did not use the word “fidelity” in our interviews.*
OSCAR Undergraduate Research Assistantships

By Denise Nazaire, Graduate Professional Assistant, OSCAR

The Students as Scholars initiative, run by the Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities & Research (OSCAR), is designed to be inclusive and encourage students from all disciplines and all academic levels to participate in research. We collaborated with the Office of Financial Aid in Spring 2013, to pilot a program using Federal Work Study to fund undergraduate research assistant positions. Essentially, our program is designed to give faculty “free” research assistance, with the understanding that they must give students direct experience with research or scholarship, at a level that is consistent with the student’s skills and interests. In the 2013-2014 academic year, we successfully partnered 38 students with faculty mentors. Feedback from faculty this past Fall, has indicated that most students are not only adapting to the research environment, but in some cases excelling. We anticipate that this program will continue to expand opportunities for undergraduate students to be introduced to the concept of scholarship and to learn the research or scholarly methods in their field.

Undergraduate Research Assistant, Alec Lamp, working at ACE!

Update from the ACE! Undergrad Research Lab

Now in its fourth year, the ACE! Undergraduate Research Lab continues to work with dedicated GMU students with an interest and passion for correctional research. Students in the lab work with graduate student, post-doctoral and faculty mentors to learn research skills, advance their knowledge of the discipline and improve their critical thinking skills. To date, Jill Viglione (Doctoral Candidate) has co-directed the lab (with Dr. Rudes). With her dissertation in the works and graduation on the horizon, Jill is transitioning out of the position and passing the baton to another ACE! doctoral student, Lauren Duhaime. Thanks Jill for all your hard work and dedication to the growth of this fabulous undergraduate program…and welcome Lauren.

Students interested in a undergraduate research 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 post-graduation life.

Lauren Duhaime, Co-Director, UG Lab
Coming Home Jobless: How Released Inmates Navigate Employment Post-Incarceration

By Grace Beya, Undergraduate, Criminology, Law & Society Major
Paper completed for CRIM 490: Prisoner Reentry, Spring, 2014 (with Dr. Rudes)

The current economy, coupled with the stigma that comes with a prison record, often creates a “no win” situation for many ex-offender job applicants leaving them repeatedly denied job opportunities. To effectively reintegrate back into society released offenders often need the structure and financial stability that employment offers. The benefits of employment for released prisoners and the challenges that come with having a job raises questions regarding how to improve post-prison employment.

What do we know already?
Over 600,000 U.S. prisoners are released each year, most of whom lack post-release services to assist them with finding employment, housing and addiction treatment (Petersilia, 2003). These ex-offenders regularly return to communities with high rate of unemployment and crime. This further diminishes their likelihood of successful reintegration. Securing stable employment is one of the major contributors of successful reentry (Varghese & Cummings, 2012). That is, having a job is one way formerly incarcerated individuals make steps towards a crime-free life. Yet, it is also one of the most challenging tasks for a person with a prison record. For released prisoners to compete with the current workforce we need innovative initiatives both during and post-incarceration (Solomon, Johnson, Travis & McBride, 2004).

How does Employment Fit into the Broader Reentry Picture?
Research suggests that a criminal record has a negative impact on employment success regardless of demographic factors such as skills and race (Pager, Western & Sugie, 2009). Presently, there is ample discussion around the topic of employment and criminal records and whether or not employers are justified to dismiss applicants based solely on prior criminal history? Employers have discretion regarding the hiring process and may choose not to be liable for these returning prisoners’ actions at work. These challenges make it difficult to find ways in which released individuals can leave prison with transferable skills and experience that will allow them to compete in today’s labor market.

How Can We Improve Employment Preparation and Opportunities for Ex-Offenders?
Providing in-prison employment programs such as training courses, job assignments and work-release all help prevent inmates from experiencing on-going idleness, while giving them a sense of responsibility and productivity (Atkins & Rostad 2003; Solomon et al., 2004). In-prison employment and employment programs also allow inmates to develop job skills and work habits that will help them adjust to the workforce post-release. The criminal justice system needs to invest in programs and employment opportunities that provide inmates with core skills (e.g., communication and computer skills), as well as assistance with finding jobs post-release. However, there are barriers to in-prison employment and post-prison programs that need addressing before any notable improvements occur. Some of these barriers include: 1) the public’s discontent with former prisoners’ competing for jobs; 2) the lack of space and funding in correctional facilities for training, and 3) policies and restrictions placed on prisons regarding employment.

The first way to address these issues includes changing the mindset of the general public regarding crime, criminals and criminal records. One of the hiccups comes from the public’s general dislike and distrust of released prisoners. In fact, the public often views offenders as second-class citizens with little ability to contribute to society (Geiger, 2006). By changing the general population’s view of prisoners from inhuman to human and containing the debt these individuals must pay to society to their sentence (not continuing to punish them post-release), we can improve their overall post-release treatment. This solution is not tangible as it is challenging to change peoples’ thinking. However, the media often sends a powerful message that affects the general population. Using various media to convince the public to challenge and reframe their portrayal of prisoners is
one potentially impactful option. This is only attainable if there is consensual desire between the prison system and the media to make those changes to make employment more accessible to returning prisoners.

Second, there is an intense need for effective transitional employment-based programs that work on refining the marketable skills learned through in-prison work. Some studies provide initial evidence that employment programs, especially those focused on career counseling post-release can increase career related behavior, self-efficacy and assist in a successful reentry (Fitzgerald et al., 2013). A vocational assessments and development plans specific to the individual that begins in the correctional facility and is extended upon release can allow for a successful job placement and job retention (Rakis, 2005). Attaining that would imply making policy changes regarding the budget allocated to the prison system for such programs and improving the willingness of correctional workers to facilitate those changes.

Lastly, we should reexamine our policies regarding how long after release an individuals’ record can be either removed or sealed in order to facilitate employment opportunities. Changes in this area could incentivize ex-offenders to become and stay crime-free and move into the role of a productive and worthy citizen. Expungement or sealing of criminal records has received a wide range of acceptance over the years. This is evident through the legislative bills such as the Indiana House Bill 1211 (2010) that authorizes expungement of persons convicted with a certain misdemeanor or some Class D felony offenses after eight years (NELP, 2011). States such as Mississippi have also passed bills that authorize expungement relief to persons with certain first-time felony convictions (NELP, 2011). Another alternative is bonding, which insures employers in case of theft, embezzlement, forgery, etc. by the employee. This provides employers with a safety net and makes ex-offender, who are considered “at-risk” employees, more marketable (National HIRE Network, 2005). For this to occur, there needs to be a close collaboration between the criminal justice system, the correctional system, policy makers and the general population.

Where can folks go for more information or for help?

It is important, when looking at employment and prisoner reentry to understand that it is not just one-dimensional. Getting a job will not, by itself, fix all the reentry challenges individuals leaving prison face. There are several factors specific to each individual that makes reentry challenging. There is no single or tailored solution for all. However, ground-level efforts will have noticeable improvements in the long run. To learn more about research pertaining to employment, employment programs and prisoner reentry, visit http://www.urban.org/projects/reentry-portfolio/employment.cfm or www.gmuace.org.

References


Meet ACE’s New Team Members

Rachel Fulghum - Undergraduate Research Assistant

Why did you join ACE?!
I joined ACE because one of my professors, Lincoln Sloas, thought it would be something I would be interested in. With his help, I was able to become part of the team! Now I’m very excited to start working on new projects and furthering my knowledge of corrections.

What will you be working on in your research with ACE?!
Among the many things I will be working on at ACE, some of them include an App for probation and parole officers to use specifically geared towards helping them with their tasks, and a project in Maryland where we interact with probation and parole officers in an effort to find some of the biggest problems they face today regarding workload, and expectations.

One thing you hope to learn at ACE?!
I hope to learn many things from ACE! But one thing I really hope to learn as an undergrad is proper research methods so that I may apply them to my career in the future.

What are your future plans?!
After I graduate, I plan on becoming either a police officer, or a corrections officer for Fairfax County, or any other county in northern/central Virginia. My ultimate goal is to become a detective, specifically focused on drug and human trafficking.

Alec Lamp - Undergraduate Research Assistant

Why did you join ACE?!
I joined ACE during my junior year at George Mason University to explore a new realm in the criminological field as well as to gain experience that would help me further myself and my future career.

What will you be working on in your research with ACE?!
I will be assisting in coding data, as well as helping with data analysis.

One thing you hope to learn at ACE?!
I hope to gain a better understanding of the way that our justice system handles not just crime, but the aftermath of convictions on the guilty.

What are your future plans?!
My plans upon graduating from George Mason are to become active in the justice system; taking the steps necessary to pursue a career with the U.S. Marshal Service, or another realm in the CJS that may interest me.

Sara Debus-Sherrill - Research Assistant

Sara Debus-Sherrill is a doctoral student in the Criminology, Law, and Society Program at George Mason University and a manager of criminal justice research at ICF International. Sara’s previous experience includes working as a research associate at the Urban Institute’s Justice Policy Center, research assistant at the University of Alabama’s Psychopathy Research Group, Nurturing Group co-leader at Child Abuse Prevention Services, peer educator for Leanne Knot Violence Against Women Prevention Project, and internship positions with the Alabama Department of Youth Services, University of Alabama Clinical Psychology clinic, and Charity Medical Hospital of Louisiana Psychiatric Ward. She has also served as an instructor and teaching assistant for courses in University of Alabama’s Psychology department. Sara received her B.S. in Psychology from Tulane University and her M.A. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Alabama. Her primary research interests lie in the intersection of the criminal justice and mental health systems, inmate safety and experiences in correctional settings, and applied policy and program evaluation.

Dylan Rosch
ACE!’s Program Manager Gina Rosch and her husband Jon-Michael Rosch welcomed a daughter, Dylan Lorraine Rosch on November 7, 2013. Dylan weighed 6 lbs 7 oz. and was 18.5 inches long.
Awards

Deputy Director Danielle Rudes Awarded Tenure

In exciting ACE! news, Deputy Director, Danielle S. Rudes, was awarded tenure this spring. In August, her title changes from Assistant to Associate Professor. The crew at ACE! is honoring this achievement daily with kind words and plenty of chocolate. Congratulations, Dr. Rudes...well done!

Post-Doc Brandy Blasko Accepted into NAHDAP Summer Workshop

ACE! Post-Doc, Brandy Blasko also has some exciting news. She was recently accepted into the National Addiction & HIV Data Archive Program’s (NAHDAP) summer workshop “The Pathways to Desistance Study: Analyzing the Life Event Calendar Data for Substance Abuse Research,” held from July 28–30, 2014 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The ICPSR is an international association consisting of over 700 academic institutions with the goal of expanding research. ICPSR sponsors research and educational activities in addition to maintaining a growing data archive of more than 500,000 files. The workshop includes analyzing longitudinal data of 1,354 juvenile offenders and their substance abuse behaviors. Dr. Blasko will use the Pathways Desistance Data to examine the intersection between substance use and sexual behaviors over the life course. Congrats, Brandy!

GRA Jill Viglione Awarded NSF Dissertation Funding

Jill received word twas awarded a Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) for her project: Bridging the Research/Practice Gap: Street-Level Decision Making and Historical Influences related to Evidence-Based Practices in Adult Probation. This is a very competitive and prestigious award. ACE! is so proud of Jill’s accomplishment!

Preparing for Careers in the Academy Workshop

In demonstration of the well-rounded graduate students at ACE!, both Lincoln Sloas and Kirsten Hutzell (ACE! affiliate) were accepted into and completed the Preparing for Careers in the Academy workshop sponsored by the Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence (ctfe.gmu.edu). Next year, ACE!’s Stephanie Maass will join this prestigious group. Congrats Lincoln & Kirsten and good luck, Stephanie.

Graduation

ACE! is also proud to announce the graduations of Dr. Meghan Curran and Dr. Kirsten Hutzell. Both Megan and Kirsten are honorary ACEers! and we could not be happier to celebrate their fabulous achievements with them. Way To Go!!!
Recent Activity

**ACE! Cookout**  
*Fairfax, VA, May 19, 2014*

ACE! gathered in the Commerce parking lot on a beautiful Monday afternoon to kick off the summer. A big thank you to ACE!’s Stephanie Maass for coordinating this fun event and for manning the grill!

![Image of people at cookout]

**Windows from Prison Event: Web-based interventions and SMART APPs for Social Change**  
*Fairfax, VA, April 15, 2014*

Drs. Faye Taxman, Danielle Rudes, and June Tangney (GMU, Psychology) and representatives from the Fairfax County Department of Probation/Parole discussed the changing correctional lens that includes positive psychology concepts in interventions and treatment programming. Drawing upon decades of research, the panel discussed how the culture of corrections, the nature of interventions and the emphasis on self-determination can alter the way we handle people involved in the justice system. Instead of using coercion as a tool to mandate change, altered models focus on motivation, self-management, and web-based, smart applications to help people learn new decision and social skills. Demonstration of research projects included MAPIT, the Probation Wizard, RNR Simulation Tools and projects that address stigma and community connectedness.

![Image of panel discussion]

**Honors Students Study Jail Reentry**  
*Fairfax, VA, April 2014*

Criminology, Law & Society Undergraduate Honors Students presented research from their six month in-depth, qualitative study of a local jail. Students’ work considered both inmate and correctional officer perceptions of prisoner reentry and touched on key issues including family relationships, substance abuse treatment, desistance, gender, in-jail programs, employment and sex offender treatment.

![Image of research presentations]

Jordan Nichols  
CRIM 491/92 Honors Class  
Nicole Taylor
ACE! Researchers attend OAR Event
Arlington, VA, January 2014

January 29th ACE! researchers Catherine Salzinger, Lincoln Sloas, and Heather Toronjo had the opportunity to attend a talk hosted by OAR of Arlington featuring Bernard Kerik. After spending six years in a federal prison camp for false statements and tax fraud, the former head of the NYPD and the NYC Corrections Department now advocates for sentencing and prison reform. Mr. Kerik spoke of the draconian nature of federal mandatory minimums, the lack of proportionality in sentencing, and the dearth of programming available to those sentenced to federal prison. His personal recollection of his time in prison and those he met along the way provides interesting insight into many of the important and controversial topics surrounding prison reform today.

Graduate Students Present on U.S. Sentencing
December 12, 2013

Students in Dr. Taxman’s Sentencing Seminar presented their work to a host of interested students and faculty. Student projects included work on human dignity, gender, healthcare and correctional policy.

ACE! Celebrates the Holidays
December 2013

ACE! gathers each year at Deputy Director, Danielle Rudes’ home to celebrate the holidays together!

ACE! Presents at AHSR
Portland, OR, October 2013

Research Associate Jennifer Lerch and Graduate Research Assistant Jill Viglione traveled to Portland, Oregon in October 2013 to present at the Addiction Health Services Research Conference. Lerch presented Commitment Level to Treatment and Probation: A Preliminary Analysis of MAPIT at the Poster Session and Viglione presented Actuarial Risk and Needs Assessments: Integrating Behavioral Health Practices in Correctional Settings.
ACE! Presentations

Recent Presentations


Goldberg, V., Portillo, S., & Taxman, F.S. (2013, November). Organizational and justice issues from the perspective of middle level probation and parole agents. American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

Hutzell, K. & Sloas, L.B. (2013, November). What do we know about crime and place research in the classroom?: An exploratory study. 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 presentation at the Addiction Health Services Research Conference (AHSR), Portland, OR.


Murphy, A., Mbaba, M, Wooditch, A., & Taxman, F.S. (2013, November). Predicting compliance with medication regimens among justice-involved opioid users. Presented at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

ACE! Director, Faye Taxman, with Ted Palmer and James Byrne at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting in Atlanta, GA, November 2013.


Upcoming Presentations


Goldberg, V. (2014, May). The use of peer navigation in the criminal justice system. To be presented at Law & Society Association Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN.


Murphy, A., Maass, S., & Toronjo, H. (2014, August). The RNR Simulation Tool—Moving risk-need-
responsivity research into practice in community corrections. Workshop to be presented at the American Probation and Parole Association 39th Annual Training Institute, New Orleans, LA.

Rudes, D.S (2014, May). *Punishment in the community: Exploring punishment on the ground in local communities*. Chairing this session at the Law & Society Association Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN.

Rudes, D.S (2014, May). *The agents of the criminal justice system* To be presented at Law & Society Association Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN.


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**Publications**


Ph.D. Candidate Jill Viglione

Jill Viglione is a Ph.D. candidate in the Criminology, Law and Society program at George Mason University. She currently works at the Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence where works on a wide variety of funded research projects and co-directs the Undergraduate Research Lab. Jill’s research interests focus on the processes associated with the implementation of evidence-based practices (EBPs) in correctional settings. With growing empirical research finds that a correctional system devoted to punishment is ineffective and may result in criminogenic effects, many justice organizations are adopting EBPs that move away from emphasizing punishment and move towards rehabilitative practices. EBP implementation requires justice organizations to adopt new protocols and change work practices, often falling heavily on street-level workers as they adopt, adapt, and implement policy and practice changes. The potential for EBPs to improve correctional practice and better serve offenders and communities is dependent on the way EBPs operate at the street-level. Jill is currently working on her dissertation that examines the transportability of health-based practices to adult probation settings by looking at how street-level workers understand, align and adapt evidence-based treatments into their existing work routines. Using observations, interviews and surveys, her dissertation examines: 1) how POs understand, define and adapt new practices to their existing organizational routines; 2) the conditions under which POs make adaptations to policy, and 3) the role organizational culture and institutional history plays in shaping adaptation decisions, which influences POs’ practices and outcomes.

Post Doctoral Research Fellow Brandy Blasko

Dr. Brandy L. Blasko is a former prison employee who received her Ph.D. in Criminal Justice from Temple University in 2013. After graduation she chose to pursue a career in academia and is currently a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at ACE! under the supervision of Faye Taxman with a joint appointment in the Human Emotions Research Lab (Department of Psychology) under June Tangney. Through this unique opportunity she has gained experience in the intersection of criminology and social psychology. Brandy is a quantitative criminologist and trained clinician who strives to allow her experiences as a practitioner to shape her research questions.

Brandy’s research interests fall broadly in the area of criminal justice decisionmaking. For her dissertation she used multi-level modeling to study prison staff discretion and decisionmaking specifically. Using 1,610 prison cases nested within staff decisionmakers across 21 prisons, she was able to operationalize parameters reflecting important prison decisionmaking issues. Results from her work are currently under-review at different peer-reviewed journals. Building on her dissertation work, Brandy has spent her time at GMU engaged in studies to better understand how prison staff use of discretion effects prisoner perceived formal helping relationships and procedural justice, and in turn how those individual perceptions relate to various criminal justice outcomes. Brandy, with Danielle Rudes (ACE! Deputy Director), is currently conducting a multi-method pilot study in six prisons to examine how prison staff-prisoner interactions and prisoner perceptions and experiences of staff discretion in the larger prison context facilitate or impede behavior and change during custody and post-release.

Brandy plans to obtain a position at an academic institution where she can continue her research and get back to teaching—ideally, courses on topics such as prisons and research methods.
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.

Upcoming Events

Law & Society Association 50th Birthday Party
Held at the LSA meetings in Minneapolis, MN. The party will include trivia, dancing, food, drinks and surprises. Deputy Director Danielle Rudes and several ACE! GRAs will be in attendance.
Friday May 30th from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m.

2014 Howard-Dartmouth Collaborative Summer School
Recovery of African-Americans with Severe Mental Illness
June 9-13, 2014, 8am-4pm
Howard University Louis Stokes Health Sciences Library, 4th Floor
501 W St NW, Washington, DC 20059

Stockholm Crime Symposium Panel
Drs. Faye Taxman and Danielle Rudes will travel to Stockholm, Sweden to serve on a panel with Joan Petersila (discussant), a Stockholm Prize Winner, and Shawn Bushway (University at Albany). The panel is called “The limits, Challenges & Risks of Risk Assessment.”
June 10th at 9:30 a.m.

Forum on the Collateral Consequences of Mass Incarceration
Event in partnership with OAR & the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NADL).
September 18, 2014, Exact times TBD
Founders Hall 125 & 126 - Multipurpose Rooms at the Arlington GMU Campus