

# Creating a Model Correctional Officer Training Academy: Implications from a National Survey

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**THE MASS IMPRISONMENT** movement, which eventually led to more than 2.4 million offenders being incarcerated on any given day in the United States, has justifiably earned considerable policy analysis (Petersilia & Cullen, 2015). With the increased inmate population, scholars have also focused in detail on the taxing conditions inside American prisons that negatively affect the health, safety, and future criminality of the incarcerated (Cullen, Jonson, & Stohr, 2014; Simon, 2014). Equally important, however, is the plight of those who, day in and day out, must not only survive inside prison walls but engage in the daunting occupational task of managing this inmate nation—correctional officers. Although research on correctional officers has expanded (see, e.g., Johnson, Rocheleau, & Martin, 2017; Steiner & Meade, 2014), one area has received relatively little attention: the extent and nature of the job training that officers receive. By contrast, information on police training is more common (see, e.g., Reaves, 2009).

In this context, this project was undertaken to assess the current status of correctional officer training through a national survey of state departments of correction. This assessment is then used to suggest what a model training program delivered by a Correctional Officer Training Academy might entail. The larger purpose of this study is to call attention to the need to take stock of the training prison guards receive and to develop ideas on how such training may be improved upon in the future. In particular, the potential role of

officers in providing treatment is considered (see Toch & Klofas, 1982).

The issue of training takes on importance when it is realized that approximately 428,870 people hold the title of “correctional officer/prison guard” in America (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). The number of correctional officers a state employs generally depends on the size of the inmate population housed in its jails and prisons. The states with the greatest numbers of correctional officers include Texas, California, Florida, New York, and Pennsylvania (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). For all states, there are minimum qualifications for education level and age. To be qualified to become a correctional officer at a state-level institution, an applicant must have at minimum a high school diploma or its equivalent and be at least 18 years of age (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017).

## The Role of the Correctional Officer

The primary role of a correctional officer in a jail or prison is to maintain security and safety by monitoring and guarding inmates (Osborne, 2014). This role, however, is multidimensional, encompassing much more than managing inmates. Correctional officers must complete daily custodial tasks (e.g., guard cell blocks), aid in offender programming, and work with special populations (e.g., mentally ill offenders, drug offenders, elderly offenders) (Johnson & Price, 1981; Scott, 2006). To meet these diverse job responsibilities, correctional officers must be equipped with a spectrum of

skills. For example, they must be able to work with people from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds, lead and supervise others, and make quick decisions in a stressful environment (Office of Personnel Management, 2016).

As a prelude to an assessment of training nationwide, this section will describe the various duties and responsibilities that comprise the correctional officer role. This role can be categorized into four primary functions: (1) the management of inmates, (2) how officers maintain security and safety, (3) aiding offender rehabilitation, and (4) managing special populations in prisons.

### *Inmate Management*

Much of a correctional officer’s work is characterized by a caretaking role (Scott, 2006). According to Scott (2006), the caretaking role of a correctional officer involves a set of routine, often tedious, tasks that must be carried out daily. Such tasks include locking and unlocking cell doors; checking the functionality of locks, bars, and cells; conducting security roll calls; taking requests from prisoners; doing laundry; and sometimes making meals for inmates. Correctional officers are also responsible for assisting in the booking and receiving of new inmates, transporting inmates from court to jail or prison, and making sure their respective cell block meets state-mandated safety and security standards (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). To maintain general security, correctional officers must pay careful attention to the whereabouts of all inmates within their

cell block. This responsibility involves tasks such as taking head counts, watching surveillance camera footage, and conducting security walkthroughs (Scott, 2006).

### *Officer Safety and Security*

Correctional officers have the duty of keeping themselves, inmates, and other staff in the institution safe (Dvoskin & Spiers, 2004; Ferdik, Smith, & Applegate, 2014; Osborne, 2014). To achieve safety, officers regularly check cells for contraband (e.g., makeshift knives, drugs), ensure locks and cell bars are not jammed or weakened, and maintain sanitary living conditions for the inmates. Further, officers regularly inspect mail coming in and out of the prison and check visitors for illegal substances or contraband (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; U.S. Department of Justice, 2003). A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice (2003) found that inmates' visitors and the mail were the primary ways in which drugs enter correctional institutions. Thus, correctional officers must remain cognizant of visitors and the mail received by the institution to ensure safety and security. Additionally, officers are often required to practice responses to emergency situations. For example, mock riots and escapee scenarios are exercises that are regularly practiced to protect prison staff and inmates as well as maintain public safety (U.S. Department of Justice, 1992).

In some situations, officers must confront disruptive inmates who violate the institution's rules. Officers must write reports and document all details of these altercations. Officers have the authority to discipline inmates who commit infractions by transferring them to other cells, suspending privileges, and/or assigning disciplinary duties (U.S. Department of Justice, 1992). When officers notice significant behavioral changes in inmates, they may increase the level of supervision toward those inmates and keep records of their behaviors. This is done in an attempt to prevent more serious events from occurring, such as an assault on a staff member or other inmates (U.S. Department of Justice, 1992).

Notably, an inherent risk of working in a correctional institution is the possibility of becoming a victim of assault or other crime (Konda, Tiesman, Reichard, & Hartley, 2013). Examining statistics of assaults on correctional officers, Lahm (2009) found that most assaults on correctional officers are very personal (i.e., not random), and that prison violence can be attributed to overcrowding, lack of inmate

programs, and longer mandatory sentences for inmates. Regarding non-fatal injuries experienced by correctional officers, Konda and colleagues (2013) found that transportation, self-inflicted gunshot wounds, and overexertion were responsible for most of the non-fatal injuries in their sample.

Similar to Lahm (2009), Konda and colleagues (2013) found that being a correctional officer remains a dangerous profession in the United States. In 2011, work-related injuries/illness that required correctional officers to miss at least one day of work occurred at a rate of 544 per 10,000 full-time employees. This ratio is more than four times greater than that of all other workers from other professions who missed a day of work due to work-related injuries/illness (117 per 10,000) (Konda et al., 2013). If we focus only on assaults and violence, correctional officers are injured by assaults and violent acts at a rate of 254 per 10,000 full-time employees. In contrast, the average rate for all other occupations in the United States is roughly 7 per 10,000 full-time employees (Konda et al., 2013). The only profession with higher rates of violent assaults and on-the-job injuries is law enforcement (Gordon, Proulx, & Grant, 2013).

Officers must also confront the fears of victimization by inmates, which can have adverse effects on officers (Gordon & Baker, 2017). Fear of victimization has been found to increase job stress and to reduce both officers' organizational commitment and their overall job satisfaction (Cullen, Link, Wolfe, & Frank, 1985). Taxman and Gordon (2009) reported that such fear is associated with the race of the officer and the security level of the institution in which they are employed. Officers' fear of victimization may also influence how they work with inmates, leading them to interact negatively with inmates and take a more defensive approach in non-confrontational encounters (Gordon & Baker, 2017). Fear could also inhibit officers from meeting their responsibilities related to human services, such as modeling prosocial behavior or being a caretaker for inmates (Johnson & Price, 1981; Scott, 2006).

### *Correctional Officers' Role in Rehabilitation*

Correctional officers can potentially play a meaningful role in the rehabilitation of inmates (Johnson et al., 2017; Schaefer, 2018). Teske and Williamson (1979), for example, found that correctional officers tended to believe they were the most important

individuals during inmates' rehabilitation process. By monitoring inmates' behaviors daily and using progressive sanctions and rewards, correctional officers could aid in offender behavioral change while outside the bounds of treatment groups and counseling sessions. Because correctional officers spend the bulk of their time with inmates, opportunities emerge for the two groups to form relationships. Through these relationships, the officer may better understand the risks and needs of inmates and be in a position to advise inmates of the treatment and programs available to them within their institution.

In many states, correctional officers serve as liaisons between the institution and the community to help released inmates integrate into treatment centers, halfway houses, employment, and ultimately back into the community (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). In addition, officers may assist inmates with registering for GED or college courses, identifying employment opportunities, scheduling counseling appointments, and/or matching them to appropriate treatment and services provided by their institution (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017).

In sum, officers may serve as important figures in inmates' lives. To some inmates, correctional officers may be seen as role models, helping them cope with many of the hardships of life behind bars. As Johnson and Price (1981) suggest, the correctional officer may shepherd inmates through periods of serious and potentially disabling stress.

### *Working with Special Populations*

The inmate population in U.S. prisons is heterogeneous (Berg & DeLisi, 2006). Inmates differ racially and ethnically, in age, in cognitive abilities and challenges, and in risks and needs. Accordingly, the U.S. prison population is composed of large numbers of mentally ill, elderly, and gang-affiliated inmates (Crawley, 2006). In addition, some inmates enter prison with serious and infectious diseases that require special accommodations (Potter & Rosky, 2014).

Correctional officers are confronted with the task of managing such special populations. For example, according to Dvoskin and Spiers (2004), officers use specific strategies to work with mentally ill inmates, such as psychotherapy. An officer may attend an inmate's consultation with a mental health staff member, identify special housing and behavioral programs to facilitate the inmate's success while in the institution, and/or submit reports

to doctors to have psychotropic medications prescribed (see Dvoskin & Spiers, 2004).

Elderly inmates are another special population that officers must manage, being cognizant of age-specific needs and problems. Thus, the elderly have different nutritional requirements than younger inmates and have body temperatures that regulate and react differently than those of younger inmates (Cummings, 1999). They may also have diseases that could cause them to act out (e.g., Alzheimer's) and suffer from brittle bones, slower reaction times, and poor eyesight and hearing (Cummings, 1999). These issues take on added salience given that 10 percent of the state prison population is 55 years or older, a result of the 200 percent growth in this population's incarceration between 1993 and 2013 (Carson & Sabol, 2016). Some estimates conclude that by the year 2030, one in three inmates will be 50 years or older (Allen, Latessa, & Ponder, 2016). Thus, correctional officers need to be trained to effectively work with and manage larger elderly inmate populations.

Prisons can also be breeding grounds for illnesses and infectious diseases, given inmates' proximity to one another, shared hygiene spaces (e.g., showers and restrooms), and the continuous influx of offenders into the institution who may suffer from poor health prior to incarceration (Massoglia, 2008). When managing inmates with infectious diseases, correctional officers must ensure that all health and safety standards within their institutions are met. In addition, officers are required to submit health, safety, and sanitation reports to the appropriate departments on a regular basis (U.S. Department of Justice, 1992). By doing so, diseases are less likely to spread, and inmates can receive the medications they need to treat such diseases.

### Coping with a Challenging Job

Working as a correctional officer not only may be dangerous but also may elicit negative affective responses. Correctional officers are regularly depicted as being in stressful roles (Armstrong et al., 2015; Cullen et al., 1985; Griffin, Hogan, Lambert, Tucker, & Baker, 2010). Role ambiguity and conflict, including the difficulty of balancing custodial and human services expectations, are linked to correctional officer stress (Cullen et al., 1985; Hepburn & Albonetti, 1980). Role conflict has been related to officers' job dissatisfaction, interpretation of their jobs as being dangerous, alienation from the organization,

and heightened levels of work and life stress (Grossi, Keil, & Vito, 1996; Hepburn & Albonetti, 1980; Lambert et al., 2009).

Prison crowding is another factor associated with correctional officer stress, a relevant consideration given that many state prisons operate 200 percent to 300 percent above recommended maximum occupancies (Carson, 2014). Research has found that in overcrowded institutions, correctional officers report elevated levels of stress, concerns about their own safety, and an impaired ability to perform their job the way that they would prefer (Martin, Lichtenstein, Jenkot, & Forde, 2012). Crowding may also negatively affect officers' ability to effectively manage the inmates in their institution, a factor that could compromise their ability to maintain safety and security—primary functions of their jobs (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2008).

Notably, job burnout has been linked to employment as a correctional officer. Bourbonnais, Malenfant, Vézina, Jauvin, and Brisson (2005), for example, found burnout among correctional officers to be nearly twice as high as that of employees in other professions. As noted, prison work in general can be dissatisfying (Cullen, Link, Cullen, Wolfe, 1989; Leip & Stinchcomb, 2016). Some research suggests that educational attainment may increase job dissatisfaction, because officers believe they are not afforded the opportunity to use the skills and knowledge acquired in their schooling (Grossi et al., 1996; Lindquist & Whitehead, 1986). Other factors associated with increased job dissatisfaction include longevity of employment at a single institution, low salaries, variable shift times and hours, and working during understaffed shifts (Marshia, LaPlante, Allen, & Metcalf, 2005; Swenson, Waseleski, & Hartl, 2008).

Finally, correctional officers may experience heightened mental and physical health risks. Research reports that the risk of suicide among correctional officers is 39 percent higher than that of the general U.S. labor force (Stack & Tsoudis, 1997); in addition, officers experience high rates of depressive behaviors and symptoms (Obidoa, Reeves, Warren, Reisine, & Cherniack, 2011) as well as the likelihood of contracting physical illnesses, including hypertension, stomach ulcers, and alcoholism (Cheek & Miller, 1982). Recent research has documented that officers also have high levels of post-traumatic stress syndrome (Violanti, 2017).

### The Need for Training

The concerns and challenges mentioned above point to the growing importance of correctional officers' need for comprehensive training programs. To help cope effectively with job demands, it is vital that training programs prepare officers for what they will experience within the prison. Thus, correctional officers should be trained and equipped with the necessary skill sets to manage inmates effectively, keep their institution safe and orderly, deliver rehabilitation and treatment services, and work with and manage special inmate populations. Among the few studies that exist, previous research suggests that correctional officers who receive quality job training tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Armstrong, Atkin-Plunk, & Wells, 2015). Quality job training has also been linked to officers having positive sentiments toward their jobs and less feelings of job burnout (Lambert, Paoline, & Hogan, 2006).

#### Methods

To develop a portrait of the training received by newly hired correctional officers in the United States, a national survey sponsored by the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute (UCCI) was administered between 2016 and 2017. Directors of departments of corrections training academies from all 50 states were contacted by email and asked to participate in the study. The directors were surveyed due to their knowledge about their state's correctional officer training programs, including knowledge of the curricula and procedures. Thus, given their positions, we assumed that they would be best positioned to serve as their state's representative and able to describe the training provided by their individual states. The responses thus are presented as data pertaining to states' training activities.

Potential respondents were provided with a link to an online survey through Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool used to conduct survey research, evaluations, and other data-collection activities. Respondents were also given the option to complete the survey in paper form or by telephone. Training academy directors who failed to respond to the initial email were subsequently contacted by phone, twice if necessary. Altogether, 44 out of 50 state training academy directors responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 88 percent (32 by Qualtrics, 11 by paper, and one by telephone).

### Survey

A 66-question survey was developed to identify specific methods and topics that each state incorporates into their training programs for newly hired correctional officers. The Correctional Officer Training Questionnaire was divided into two general sections: (1) general information about characteristics of correctional officer training (e.g., facility characteristics, training characteristics, and recruiting tactics) and (2) training content, including the topics and subject areas in which new correctional officers receive training (e.g., inmate management, officer safety, security, and practical skills, history and development of corrections, ethics, and professionalism, criminal justice systems, laws, rights, and investigations, and special populations and special topics).

### Measures

#### General Training Characteristics

We assessed five types of general training characteristics: (1) location of training, (2) training hours, (3) training methods, (4) continuing in-service training, and (5) the recruitment process. The measures used to probe these areas are described below. When appropriate, reference is made to tables where response categories are listed (though the tables are not presented until the Results sections).

First, we asked directors whether their state has a training academy to train newly hired correctional officers. Respondents were prompted to check yes or no. If *no* was selected, respondents were directed to write in the location of the training and the agency responsible for conducting the training.

Second, the survey measured the length of correctional officer training through several questions. Directors were instructed to report how many hours of training newly hired correctional officers were required to attend. They were asked to report the number of basic training hours and the number of hours designated for on-the-job training (see Table 1).

Third, training methods refer to the techniques and materials used to instruct new correctional officers. The respondents were requested to report all the ways in which course materials are conveyed (e.g., instructional videos, role plays, PowerPoint lectures). They were also asked if correctional officers were required to complete any job shadowing or pass written examinations prior to independent employment (see Table 2).

Fourth, the survey examined whether

departments were committed to the continuous quality improvement of staff and training protocols. To do this, we asked respondents to report the number of months that had passed since their state had updated their training curriculum. We also asked whether officers were required to attend annual in-service training or booster sessions. If the respondent answered *yes*, he or she was prompted to identify how many days this training period lasted.

Fifth, we assessed the process used to recruit new officers. Recruitment refers to the methods state correctional departments use to fill openings in correctional officer positions. The respondents were asked to select all of the recruiting methods they use from a list provided in the questionnaire. Examples of recruiting strategies listed on the survey included job fairs, retired military personnel networks, and referrals from current staff (see Table 4).

#### Training Content

Respondents were surveyed regarding which subjects new correctional officers are trained in across five general areas: (1) inmate management; (2) officer safety, security, and practical skills; (3) the history and development of corrections, ethics, and professionalism; (4) criminal justice systems, laws, rights, and investigations; and (5) special populations and special topics. Under each subject area, several corresponding topics were listed. Respondents were thus prompted to select yes or no to indicate whether new correctional officers receive training in one or more of those topics. Selecting *yes* confirmed that their state provides training on that topic area and selecting *no* confirmed their state does not provide training on that topic area. For the special topics and special population subsection, respondents were requested to indicate how many hours of training officers receive on that particular topic area if they provide training on that topic. Respondents were also encouraged to identify any topic areas for which new correctional officers received training that were not listed within the five subjects. A brief description of each subject matter and the topic areas within those subjects is provided below.

The first subject focused on inmate management and asked respondents to indicate whether new correctional officers are trained on topics related to tracking, processing, and supervising inmates. Topic areas included, for example, booking/receiving, security and count procedures, and inmate transport (see Table 5).

The second subject, officer safety, security,

and practical skills, asked respondents whether new correctional officers are trained on topics related to enforcing order in the facility in order to protect themselves and the inmates. For instance, topic areas within this subject included use of force, riot control, and cell extractions (see Table 6).

The third subject focused on the history and development of corrections, ethics, and professionalism. Respondents were instructed to indicate whether new correctional officers are trained on topics related, for example, to the history of laws and development of corrections, professionalism, and the role of correctional officers (see Table 7).

The fourth subject, criminal justice systems, laws, rights, and investigation, included topic areas related to the constitutional and civil rights of inmates and the role of the criminal justice system. Additional topic areas within this subject focused on the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) and whether new correctional officers are trained in the preparation and presentation of testimony for and against inmates (see Table 8).

Finally, the fifth subject, special populations and special topics, focused on whether new correctional officers receive training related to supervising and managing diverse inmate groups (e.g., sex offenders, security threat groups, mentally ill offenders). The subject also included special topic areas to determine whether new correctional officers receive training in rehabilitation, cognitive-behavioral intervention, and/or the risk-need-responsivity model (see Table 9). To better assess training efforts within this subject, respondents were asked to report the number of hours of training officers receive on each topic area relevant to programming (i.e., treatment) and the number of hours of training officers receive on each topic area relevant to the management (i.e., control/supervision) of each type of specialized population/topic (see Table 10).

### Results

Based on the responses of training academy directors, data are presented on the number and percentage of states that provide training in the various topics and areas. The results are divided into two areas: (1) the characteristics of where, how long, and by what method the training occurs and (2) the content of the training that is delivered.

*General Training Characteristics*

**Training Location**

Forty-one of the 44 four responding states indicated they have training academies for correctional officer training. Three states indicated that they do not have a separate correctional training academy. In these instances, new correctional officer training takes place at the institution to which new officers as initially assigned.

**Training Hours and Methods**

The survey results also revealed that the total number of required training hours for new correctional officers varies considerably across the United States (see Table 1). Specifically, one state indicated that it requires less than 100 hours of basic training for new correctional officers. A slightly larger group (11 states) indicated that they require between 100 and 199 hours of basic training, followed by 20 states that indicated they require between 200 and 299 hours of basic training. Twelve states reported that they require over 300 hours of basic training for new correctional officers. Too few states reported the number of hours in subsequent on-the-job training that they provide for newly hired correctional officers, so we are unable report those results.

The state directors were also asked about the methods used by academies to train officers. As shown in Table 2, a large majority of states use a variety of training methods, including videos, study guides, lesson plans, PowerPoints, role playing, case studies, and skill exercises. The partial exception was workbooks, but even here 29 of 44 states reported their use.

**Training Curriculum Details**

Training directors were asked to report the number of months that had passed since their states' training curriculum had been updated. The answer was an average of 10 months. Further, respondents were asked if officers are required to attend annual in-service training or booster sessions. To this inquiry, 43 states reported that correctional officers were required to attend annual in-service training. The average length of time reported for this training was 39 hours a year. This training had to be completed for officers to maintain good standing at their institution.

States were also queried about the requirements officers must satisfy prior to full employment status. One question asked if officers in the state were required to "shadow"

a current staff member and, if yes, the amount of time that shadow period lasted. Table 3 reveals that a substantial number of states (n = 36) reported that new officers must shadow a current staff member before they can begin their job independently. The average length of time for that shadow period was reported to be 44 days. In addition, states were asked if officers were required to pass a written exam at the conclusion of the training program. As shown in Table 3, all but one state surveyed (n = 43) had this requirement. Passing scores ranged from 70 percent to 80 percent.

**Recruitment**

States reported that officers are recruited in a variety of ways. Table 4 reveals, for example, that all but one state (n = 43) use job fairs to recruit new officers. Referrals from current staff members was another common recruiting method, a practice found in 41 states. Additionally, 36 states reported using

multimedia recruiting materials (e.g., online advertisements, video brochures), while another 35 states indicated they recruit on college campuses. The majority of states also indicated that they recruit retired military personnel and/or rely on their partnerships with job services or other recruiting agencies to recruit new correctional officers (n = 32 and n = 31, respectively). The least common recruiting method reported by states were advertisements in either out-of-state publications (n = 22) or local publications (n = 29).

*Training Content: Subjects and Topic Areas*

**Inmate Management**

Correctional officers receive training for many duties that are involved with the management of inmates. As seen in Table 5, every state in the sample reported that officers are trained in security and count procedures and on the topic of inmate discipline and grievances. Additionally, a large number of states reported

**TABLE 1.**  
**Hours of Basic Training at Academies**

Training Hours	Frequency
≤ 99 Hours	1
100 – 199 Hours	11
200 – 299 Hours	20
300 + Hours	12

**TABLE 2.**  
**Tools used for training newly hired correctional officers**

Training Utilities	Frequency Yes	Percentage Yes
Instructional videos	43	97.7
Study guides	38	86.4
Lesson plans	42	95.5
PowerPoints	44	100
Role plays	42	95.5
Case studies	43	97.7
Workbooks	29	65.9
Skills Exercises	42	95.5

**TABLE 3.**  
**Prerequisites to independent employment status**

Pre-employment requirements	Frequency Yes	Percentage Yes	Mean days (SD)	Mean score (SD)
Must job-shadow current staff*	36	83.7	43.91 days (93.18)	
Pass written exam	43	97.7		73.84 (4.48)

Note: \* indicates that percentages were based on 43 cases

**TABLE 4.**  
**Methods used by states to recruit new officers**

Recruitment Strategy	Frequency Yes	Percentage Yes
Retired military personnel networks	32	72.7
College campuses	35	79.5
Multimedia materials	36	81.8
Advertisements in local publications	29	65.9
Advertisements in out-of-state publications	22	50.0
Partnerships with job services or other recruiting agencies	31	70.5
Referrals from current staff	41	93.2
Job fairs	43	97.7

that they train officers in the areas of inmate transport and inmate supervision (n = 41 and n = 43, respectively). Inmate hygiene and facility sanitation concerns are addressed in the training programs of about two-thirds of the states surveyed. Of the items in this training topic area, the topic in which the fewest number of states provide training is the booking and receiving of inmates. About one-third (n = 16) of states reported that they train officers in this job task.

**Officer Safety, Security, and Practical Skills**

A substantial number of states reported that they train officers in safety, security, and

practical skills. As seen in Table 6, for example, all states surveyed indicated that they train officers in basic safety and security procedures, use of force, area, cell, and body searches, and inmate discipline and grievances. In addition, 42 states provide training for addressing contraband, and 39 states provide firearms training. The training area receiving the least attention in this domain was peace officer standards and training (POST); 34 states do not provide training in this topic. Another area of training that showed some inconsistency was the task of cell extractions, with only 30 states providing such training for newly hired correctional officers.

**TABLE 5.**  
Training in inmate management

Training Area	Frequency Yes	Percentage Yes
Booking/receiving	16	36.4
Security and court procedures	42	95.5
Inmate supervision	43	97.7
Inmate hygiene and facility sanitation	30	68.2
Inmate programs and services	37	84.1
Inmate discipline and grievances	44	100
Inmate transport	41	93.2

**TABLE 6.**  
Training in officer security and practical skills

Skill Area	Frequency Yes	Percentage Yes
Basic officer safety and security	44	100
Use of force	44	100
Riot control	27	61.4
Contraband*	42	97.7
Area, cell, and body searches	44	100
Cell extractions	30	68.2
Firearm training	39	88.6
Peace officer training	10	22.7

Note: \* indicates that percentages were based on 43 cases

**TABLE 7.**  
Training in the history and development of corrections, ethics, and professionalism

Training Area	Frequency Yes	Percentage Yes
History of laws and the development of corrections	28	63.6
Role of correctional officers	36	81.8
Professionalism	42	95.5
Ethics	43	97.7
Administrative investigations	29	65.9

**TABLE 8.**  
Training in criminal justice systems, laws, rights, and investigations

Training Area	Frequency Yes	Percentage Yes
Law enforcement, courts, corrections, and responsibilities	36	81.8
Constitutional rights of inmates	41	93.2
Civil rights of inmates	35	79.5
Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA)	44	100
Investigation of inmates in corrections	28	63.6
Preparation and presentation of testimony for and against inmates in court*	19	44.2

Note: \* indicates that percentages were based on 43 cases

**History and Development of Corrections, Ethics, and Professionalism**

Table 7 reveals that most states train correctional officers in the areas of ethics, professionalism, and the role of being a correctional officer. Specifically, 42 states reported that officers receive training in professionalism, and 43 states train officers in ethics. Additionally, 36 states train officers on the role of a correctional officer's job in the prison system. Also, Table 7 indicates that nearly one-third of the states surveyed (n = 16) do not train officers in the history of corrections and about law and administrative investigations against staff and inmates (n = 15).

**Criminal Justice Systems, Laws, Rights, and Investigations**

The current study reveals that states train correctional officers in criminal justice systems, laws, rights, and investigations. As seen in Table 8, all states surveyed reported that they are compliant and train officers in the aspects of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), which is a federally mandated requirement for all correctional institutions. Additionally, 36 of the 44 states in the sample reported that officers are trained in the following areas: the civil and constitutional rights of inmates, and law enforcement, courts, and correctional departments' roles and responsibilities. In addition, slightly more than one-third (n = 16) of the states reported that they do not train officers in the topics of inmate investigations, and roughly half of the states surveyed (n = 19) reported that they do not train correctional officers in the area of preparing testimony for and against inmates.

**Special Populations and Special Topics**

Importantly, substantial variation exists in both the number of states that train officers in special populations and special topics and in the number of hours that are reserved for this type of training. Also, some topics and populations are included by some states' training programs, whereas this does not occur in others.

As shown in Table 9, 41 states reported that they train officers in how to work with mentally ill offenders. Two other areas that 39 states designate training hours for include security threat groups (i.e., gangs) and suicidal inmates. Special populations and topics that received the least amount of training delegations were the overseeing of sex offenders (n = 26 do not train in) and elderly offenders (n

= 20 do not train in). Of further note, training in the Risk-Need-Responsivity model occurs in less than two-fifths of the states surveyed.

Table 10 depicts the average number of training hours designated for training officers in special populations and special topics. The special topic training receiving the most attention was rehabilitation in corrections, which received an average of 3.83 hours. The special population topic that received the least amount of training hours was managing elderly offenders, with an average of 1.67 hours.

This subsection of the survey had the most variation in the number of hours trained in each topic area. For example, one state reported that it trains officers in the area of rehabilitation for 24 hours, whereas the average number of training hours for all states in this sample was 3.83 hours. Additionally, one state reported that it trains officers in the use of cognitive-behavioral interventions for 20 hours, while the average for all other responding states was 2.77 hours.

## Discussion

Given the challenges and multidimensional facets of the correctional officer role, officers would benefit from systematic training across a variety of areas. To date, little research is available on the training that officers receive once hired. To help fill the void in the literature, this investigation was undertaken to document existing training procedures for newly hired correctional officers across the United States.

Recommendations for state departments of corrections, including the content that should be trained in, the duration of training procedures, and characteristics of training that may benefit programs across the United States, are presented below. Building on these findings,

a blueprint is prepared of what a model correctional officer training academy program might entail. The intent is to improve upon current correctional officer training and to create strong, evidence-based academies that will equip officers with the skills needed to manage (if not reform) the prisoners they supervise.

### *The Current Status of Training Across States*

The current study indicates that differences exist among state training programs for correctional officers. Thus, while training for some topic areas was found in the majority of states, other training topics were found in only several states. Both common and uncommon areas of training are discussed in this section.

### *Commonly Trained Topics*

Training topics and content that were commonly reported by training directors were primarily in the areas of inmate management, custodial tasks, and security skills. For example, all states generally train officers in contraband, cell and body searches, use of force, and firearms basics. Also, nearly all states train officers in the security counting procedures of inmates, inmate supervision practices, inmate discipline and grievances, and the prison programs and services offered to inmates within their institution.

Much of the variation in training across states appeared in content areas that do not directly deal with inmate management and security functions. However, the survey did uncover some content areas, other than those included in the inmate management and security sections, for which most states provide training. For example, professionalism was a topic that a majority of states train officers in. This finding is somewhat expected, given that

the professionalization of corrections has been a common theme in contemporary criminal justice practices (Lutze, 2016). Likewise, most states train officers in the civil and constitutional rights of inmates, most likely as a means to lessen or avoid liability in state and federal litigation claims (Cornelius, 2001; Piehl & Schlanger, 2004).

In the special population and special topics domain of the survey, states primarily reported training officers in only a few of the special populations and topics that were listed in the survey. These were for security threat groups, mentally ill inmates, and suicidal inmates. Security threat groups refer to gangs or other groups of inmates that threaten the security of the institution; in-prison gangs can affect the safety of the institution, placing both staff and other inmates at risk of victimization. For example, Carlson (2001) estimated that 20 percent of assaults against correctional officers in prisons may be gang-related. Most of the states surveyed reported training in this topic area. These groups often require special methods and tactics of management. Additionally, these gang groups are large enough to cause concern for correctional staff, with nearly 25 percent of inmates in adult facilities admitting to being in an in-prison gang (Knox, 2000).

Training provided for managing mentally ill inmates and suicidal inmates was common across states. This finding may be due to the large numbers of mentally ill inmates found in U.S. prisons and the civil rights protections provided for this population in legislation (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Piehl

**TABLE 9.**  
Training in special populations and special topics

Special Population/Topic	Frequency Yes	Percentage Yes
Sex offenders	17	39.5
LGBTQ offenders	31	72.1
Security threat groups (i.e., gangs)	39	90.7
Mentally ill offenders*	41	95.3
Elderly offenders*	20	46.5
Suicidal offenders*	40	93.0
Domestic and sexual assault and stalking*	17	39.5
Rehabilitation in corrections*	25	58.1
Cognitive behavioral interventions*	19	55.8
Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model*	16	37.2

Note: \* indicates that percentages were based on 43 cases

**TABLE 10.**  
Hours trained in special populations and special topics (if trained)

Special Population/Topic	Mean (SD) Hours Trained in Area
Sex offenders	1.70 (0.81)
LGBTQ offenders	2.15 (1.89)
Security threat groups (i.e., gangs)	3.61 (2.31)
Mentally ill offenders	7.52 (8.88)
Elderly offenders	1.67 (0.75)
Suicidal offenders	3.58 (3.58)
Domestic and sexual assault and stalking	2.90 (2.08)
Rehabilitation in corrections	3.83 (5.78)
Cognitive behavioral interventions	2.77 (2.61)
Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model	2.00 (1.15)

& Schlanger, 2004). Some researchers have postulated that corrections institutions have largely replaced mental hospitals in the United States (Torrey, Kennard, Eslinger, Lamb, & Pavle, 2010), an idea that gains notoriety given that there are now three times as many mentally ill persons housed in state prisons as in mental hospitals. Accordingly, it is expected that officers receive training in this area, because the implications of mental illness in prison may be fatal. For example, one study found those who are mentally ill are more likely to commit suicide in prison (Torrey et al., 2010) and pose greater threats to correctional officers' safety (Galanek, 2015).

Another training topic that is a part of all state training programs is the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). This act was passed into law in 2003 to protect prison inmates from becoming the victims of sexual assaults while in prison (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). The law requires that all staff members in a correctional facility or agency who come into contact with inmates be trained in PREA, which calls for employees working within correctional agencies to be provided training in topics such as rape detection protocols (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012).

### *Uncommonly Trained Areas*

A correctional officer's role extends beyond his or her basic safety, security, and custodial tasks (Schaefer, 2018). However, the roles that do not fall under security and custodial roles are not always addressed by state training programs. Though statutes list one of the goals of state correctional departments as achieving the rehabilitation of inmates (Burton, Dunaway, & Kopache, 1993; Kelley, Mueller & Hemmens, 2004), topic and content areas associated with the human service and therapeutic roles of correctional officers are largely absent in many states' training curricula. For example, about half of the training directors reported that their officers are not trained in rehabilitative tasks, and two-thirds of states do not mention the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model in their training. The RNR model has been successful in the rehabilitation of offenders in many settings (Bonta & Andrews, 2017). Thus, this model surely has a place in correctional officer training programs, and sufficient statutory language in state legal codes exists to support the training (Burton et al., 1993; Johnson, Dunaway, Burton, Marquart, & Cuvelier, 1994; Kelley et al., 2004).

Given that the RNR model is not part of their training curricula, it is unsurprising that

many states do not train officers in the use of cognitive-behavioral interventions. According to the training directors surveyed, only about half of the states train officers in the use of cognitive-behavioral interventions. These types of interventions have consistently been shown to lower recidivism rates and effectively change antisocial behaviors (Bonta & Andrews, 2017). If officers were trained in cognitive-behavioral interventions, perhaps they would better understand mechanisms to change the negative behaviors of inmates into prosocial behaviors.

Another area that lacks training in state departments is the management of special populations that are found within the prison population. For example, most states do not train officers in how to manage and work with elderly offenders. Studies have shown that the number of elderly inmates incarcerated is at an all-time high (10 percent of the entire prison population) and is expected to dramatically increase in the future (Carson, 2016).

Another special population that does not receive much attention in training programs is sex offenders. Research has indicated that sex offenders are often victimized at higher rates than other inmates and often need special accommodations (Labrecque, 2016). If officers received training in how to manage these special populations, they might better understand the risks and challenges that these populations face in prison. It may be that states are using the mandated PREA training in lieu of a formalized sex offender training. The distinction between the two trainings is that the PREA is focused on preventing sexual victimization, while training officers in how to manage sex offenders covers other topics such as how sex offenders think and act.

### *A Model Training Academy*

Based on the current national survey, it is possible to identify best practices that, if combined, might provide a foundation for developing a "model" Correctional Officer Training Academy.

### *Expanding the Amount of Training*

Correctional officers should graduate from training academies with the skills and knowledge to perform their job in the safest and most effective manner. With that in mind, training programs must account for the many dimensions and roles of a correctional officer's work. Thus, to cover all of the content needed to perform the tasks for which an officer is responsible, we recommend a minimum of 300

hours of basic training. To date, slightly less than half of the states surveyed have training academy programs lasting between 200-299 basic training hours. In fact, only about one-quarter of states went beyond 300 training hours. Training officers a minimum of 300 hours may better allow for all the topics and content areas associated with correctional officer work to be covered at the training academy.

### *Continuation of Training*

Similar to training in other professions (e.g., physicians, social workers), the continuation of training should be required for all correctional officers. Nearly all states in the sample reported that officers are required to attend annual training. Such continuing education is imperative, because research is ongoing and could serve to inform new and more effective training practices. Also, the completion of an examination after training is essential to certify whether trainees retained the knowledge from the initial training program. Another training program characteristic should be for cadets to "shadow" an experienced officer before starting shifts alone. Such shadowing will allow the officers to learn from somebody who has experience working with inmates and working in the prison environment.

### *Inmate Custody and Management: Skills and Expertise*

Given that it is the primary function of their job, correctional officers should receive extensive training in maintaining safety and security through guarding inmates (Osborne, 2014). Thus, all officers should receive training in inmate management tasks and basic security and safety skills. As noted, this would involve institutional security procedures, use of force, searches, controlling contraband, cell extractions, firearms training, and so on.

Beyond such practical and often physical skills, officers need to be schooled in two areas of softer knowledge. The first area is understanding the legal and constitutional rights of inmates and how these legal considerations must guide correctional officer behavior. The second area is learning how to manage inmates in a way that increases the officers' legitimacy and evokes inmate compliance rather than opposition. Research suggests that inconsistent and gratuitously harsh treatment of inmates can increase inmates' misconduct and erode institutional stability (Steiner & Meade, 2014). Although research on the effectiveness of managerial styles is far from definitive, scholars increasingly suggest that

the use of procedural justice in interactions with offenders produces perceptions of legitimacy and compliance (Steiner & Meade, 2014; Wooldredge & Steiner, 2016). Accordingly, training correctional officers in effective managerial styles rooted in behavioral science research is essential.

### **Understanding Special Populations**

Correctional officers would benefit from understanding the risks and needs of the different populations of inmates that they guard. Thus, training officers in topics such as sex offenders, gangs, elderly inmates, suicidal inmates, mentally ill inmates, and drug-abusing inmates would likely benefit both those types of inmates and the officers. This training could help officers better accommodate the needs of inmates and allow officers potentially to play a role in the rehabilitation of these special populations.

### **Guiding the Rehabilitative Role of Correctional Officers**

Correctional officers are in a position to play prominent roles in offender rehabilitation (Johnson et al., 2017; Teske & Williamson, 1979). Officers spend more time with offenders than any other correctional staff. Previous research has discovered that correctional officers support offender rehabilitation (Burton, Ju, Dunaway, & Wolfe, 1991; Cullen, Lutze, Link, & Wolfe, 1989; Gatotoh, Omulema, & Nassiuma, 2011; Wade-Olsen, 2016). However, when examining state departments' training programs, training hours designated for rehabilitative functions and therapeutic roles of officers are often sparse. Due to the position of officers and opportunities to aid in rehabilitation, training academies should include extensive training in rehabilitative tasks and skills. This training should be based on evidence-based treatment models conducive to the behavioral change of offenders (e.g., RNR, Effective Practices in Community Supervision [EPICS]) (see Bonta & Andrews, 2017). An example of a training model that has demonstrated success in corrections is EPICS. A brief discussion about how this model could be implemented by correctional officers will follow.

Probation officers across the United States are being trained in the Effective Practices in Community Supervision model. The goal of the EPICS model is to instruct community supervision officers on how to use core correctional practices in face-to-face interactions and also how to use the principles of effective

intervention in practice (Smith, Schweitzer, Labrecque, & Latessa, 2012). The EPICS model trains community corrections officers to follow a structured approach in their interactions with offenders (Smith et al., 2012). Officers trained in EPICS are instructed to focus on higher-risk offenders, to address offenders' criminogenic needs, and to use social learning and cognitive-behavioral techniques in their interactions with offenders (Smith et al., 2012).

EPICS training could lead officers to interact more effectively with inmates. For example, in offender encounters, officers could seek to model prosocial behaviors. They could also use interactions with inmates as teaching moments, correcting thinking errors and talking with wayward inmates about alternative options for handling emotionally charged situations. As suggested, effective training might have the added benefit of improving inmates' perceptions of officers' legitimacy, thus reducing conflict and increasing compliance (see Steiner & Wooldredge, 2015).

### **Promoting Officer Wellness**

The most immediate need is to train officers in the health risks posed by inmates, such as dealing with threats and actual incidents of physical victimization (Boudoukha, Altintas, Rusinek, Fantini-Houwel, & Hautekeete, 2013) and avoiding infectious diseases (e.g., AIDS, hepatitis). But training must be expanded to educate officers in how to cope with the psychological challenges of their work, including stress, job dissatisfaction, burnout, post-traumatic stress, alienation, suicidal ideation, and depression. In addition, research now exists to capably inform the inculcation of effective coping strategies. This line of inquiry remains an area for further development for staff who work with confined populations (Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007).

### **Building Officer Professionalism**

Research shows that correctional officers do not see themselves as "hacks" whose skills are limited to custody and monitoring a punitive regimen (Johnson et al., 2017). More positively, guarding offenders should be seen as a human services profession. The hallmark of any profession is the commitment to a strong code of ethics and to task expertise (Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002). A model training academy would seek to instill this dual commitment among officers and serve to lessen the gap between research and practice by providing a channel by which trainees can learn

evidence-based practices and procedures.

Achieving this goal, however, will face a major challenge. At present, a knowledge gap exists between training goals and how to achieve those goals. Two strategies might be profitably employed to address this lack of knowledge. First, correctional officers should be seen not only as recipients of training but also as sources of insights about effective training. Officers should be interviewed initially and systematically to learn more about their perceived training needs and about their ideas on best practices with inmates. Second, criminologists need to focus their research not only on uncovering what is wrong with prisons but also on how to develop practical programs, managerial approaches, and training protocols to create safer and more reformatory institutions. This research should start by evaluating the effectiveness of current training approaches and then use this information to develop *principles of effective training*. Both the keepers and the kept merit our ongoing efforts to equip correctional officers with the understanding and expertise to do their job well.

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