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## **The Academic Connection**

**By**

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The question is often asked to me, “How does higher education fit into all of this?” From my perspective, the answer is simple and unequivocal: Higher Education and correctional training academies share a common goal – to train competent staff to deal with the many unique challenges faced by those who work in the field of Corrections.

### **Historical Aspects of Training in Corrections**

The need for specialized training in the field of Corrections was initially recognized in 1870 at the meeting of the National Prison Congress in Cincinnati, Ohio. This organization remains in existence today, under the auspices of the American Correctional Association (ACA). It was not until the 1970s however, with federal funding through LEAA (Law Enforcement Assistance Administration), that colleges and universities began to offer programs that better prepared correctional staff to meet newer job requirements. By the mid-1970s, ACA was involved in developing standards and accreditation programs for correctional facilities, including training standards.

Recognizing the need for better training, the U. S. Attorney General directed LEAA to establish a corrections academy which resulted in the creation of the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) in 1977. During this same time judges began to order correctional agencies to implement or improve existing training programs. By the 1980s more emphasis was placed on the effectiveness of the training provided, rather than the mere requirement of a training program. One reason for this is the legal liability departments face if they fail to train staff sufficiently. While training may be the first area cut with budget restrictions, the courts have made it clear that lack of funding is not an acceptable reason for failure to train.

Training has always been the top priority of the American Jail Association, the International Association of Correctional Training Personnel (IACTP), and is one of the cornerstones of the American Correctional Association’s standards and related accreditation process. All of the above associations have included higher education as a key player.

## **Administrative Priority**

Prudent administrators have placed a high priority on training. Many of these administrators recognize the benefit of their training agencies working closely in conjunction with institutions of higher education. Particularly in these times of strict budget cuts, institutions of higher education can be a resource in assisting agencies in providing required in-service training hours. One example of this would be colleges and universities that serve as a host site for video teleconferences sponsored by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). Colleges and universities that serve as host sites are able to facilitate training for correctional employees at no cost to the agency. In-service training hours have been facilitated through this resource. It proves to be an invaluable resource for agencies in need of providing in-service training hours. Establishing and maintaining a relationship between correctional entities and institutions of higher education would keep correctional agencies informed of available opportunities.

In-service training should not continually repeat the same courses every year, but include a variety of core course that requires annual refreshers along with a selection of elective courses (much like college) from which employees can choose to satisfy annual in-service required hours. Video Teleconferences offer one such avenue, at no cost to the employer, on a variety of topics relevant to working successfully in a correctional environment. Most colleges and universities have the technological capability to facilitate such offerings.

## **Training/ Education**

With all the challenges and changes facing corrections, there is a need to place greater emphasis on career development through training and education. Correctional staff should be encouraged to upgrade their education by taking college courses and pursuing advanced degrees. Many correctional agencies encourage this by offering tuition reimbursement, advancement opportunities, and pay incentives. As with any profession, education is a major factor for a successful career in corrections. While corrections is considered by many to be an “emerging” profession, it is true that if one considers the definition of “profession”, this can only be achieved through education. Education is a necessary component of and principal cause for universal recognition of any profession. Without the educational component, corrections will remain solely an occupation. There are many benefits to having an educated workforce, including expanded employment opportunities, higher income levels, and acquisition of critical job-related skills. An educated workforce has been shown to translate into a reduction of high levels of staff turnover, thereby reducing costs of training and re-training staff.

In turn, the academy experience provides employees with the knowledge and skills required to work in corrections. The Correctional Academy and Higher Education should serve to complement one another, not supplant it. We are in need of a closer

working relationship between correctional training academies and criminal justice higher education. Establishing partnerships and mutually collaborative efforts is imperative and will prove to be mutually beneficial to the correctional agencies we both strive to serve. Training and program evaluation are two areas in which practical and mutually beneficial collaboration is almost always possible.

All too frequently encountered is the failure of the criminal justice academic world and correctional training academy staff to work closely together. The consequences of this dissociation are many and varied. One is a failure to take advantage of the technical assistance and resources which many academic programs have to offer.

### **Steps in Building Relationships**

The forging of much needed and durable relationships between our colleges and universities and training academies will not occur as part of some divinely ordained or federally subsidized initiative. Rather, it will be a result of the collective efforts of individual criminal justice educators and local and state correctional training academy officials across the country. Someone must take the first step to establish or strengthen the relationship between training academies and higher education.

I encourage you to take the initiative and do what is necessary to establish and build strong and enduring relationships with higher education faculty and academic programs in your area. I encourage you to have a representative meet with a criminal justice educator and facilitate a review of mandated correctional training programs lesson plans for content, quality, and duration to determine which training modules would satisfy the content requirements for specific college courses. I have included some suggestions that may be used as a guideline in formulating an articulation agreement which I hope you will find useful.

As an educator, I feel a professional responsibility to establish and maintain a working relationship with the DOC training academy. Meetings are held on a periodic basis with representatives of the state correctional training academy to review both the curriculum of the academy and the college curriculum for the Corrections specialization. An articulation agreement has been developed that provides up to 15 hours college credits to those who complete the academy. Articulation agreements have been entered into with not only state Department of Corrections, but the Regional Jail Authority, and the local federal correctional institution as well. An apprenticeship program within DOC is also currently being reviewed to determine if additional credit may be awarded.

Awarding college credits for a certain number of hours for equivalent coursework completed at the academy provides an incentive to those who have a desire to obtain a college degree. This contributes to increased professionalism in the workplace. It also provides opportunities for advancement and promotion.

Communication must be established among higher education and correctional training academies. The relationship between higher education and correctional training academies, like the relationship between any correctional organization and the community, media, etc. must be cultivated if it is to be successful and effective. If you do not have a line of communication established with a local college or university, you are encouraged to develop this. Everyone can benefit through mutual cooperation and the development of partnerships. This applies not only to training academies, but correctional facilities as well. For example, in an effort to ensure that as an educator I am meeting the needs of correctional agencies in adequately preparing students for work in this challenging and demanding field, I have established working relationships with correctional agency representatives. This includes local, state, and federal agencies. Representatives participate in periodic reviews of the college curriculum to ensure that their needs are being met. They visit the classroom as guest speakers, serve on the college advisory board, and facilitate placement of students in internship programs, as well as provide for tours of their facilities. There are many and varied ways relationships between corrections and higher education can work to be mutually beneficial. Don't delay in making the academic connection!