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## Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing

# Research Bulletin

Representative Frank Dermody  
Chair

## Pennsylvania's Motivational Boot Camp: Summary of 2002 Legislative Report

By Cynthia A. Kempinen, Ph.D.

In 1990, the Pennsylvania Legislature passed Act 215, which established Pennsylvania's Motivational Boot Camp Program. This Act also included a mandate to the Sentencing Commission to report annually on the progress of the Boot Camp Program. This edition of the *Research Bulletin* provides a summary of the 2002 *Legislative Report*, which was comprised of three parts: 1) Who Goes to Boot Camp?, 2) Boot Camp Offender Survey, and 3) Recidivism of Boot Camp Offenders.

### What is the Motivational Boot Camp Program?

The Motivational Boot Camp, which is located in Quehanna, Clearfield County, is a six-month alternative program to prison. The impetus behind the legislation was the recognition of the severe prison overcrowding situation. Further, there was legislative interest in offering an alternative to prison that would provide a more intense rehabilitative setting conducive to achieving the goal of crime reduction.

The Boot Camp is designed to instill discipline and structure through regimented sixteen-hour days consisting of work and program activities. A typical day begins at 5:30 with reveille, followed by an hour of physical training. The remainder of the day is tightly scheduled with education, counseling, and work. Offenders who have not graduated from high school attend mandatory education classes, while those who have a degree are assigned to work duties. About 84% of offenders educated at the Boot Camp receive their GED.

The Boot Camp opened in June 1992, with 39 offenders admitted into the program that year. In 2000, the Boot Camp admitted 516 offenders, with a new platoon of approximately 50 offenders arriving nearly every month. The program has a high graduation rate, with 86% graduating during 2000. Offenders who voluntarily [7%] or involuntarily [7%] withdraw from the program return to prison for the remainder of their minimum sentence prior to being reviewed by the Parole Board for release. Those who graduate from the program are automatically released to parole supervision until the expiration of their maximum sentence. Effective February 2002, all offenders graduating from the Boot Camp Program are required to participate in a structured re-entry program for a minimum of 90 days following graduation from the Boot Camp.

### MAJOR FINDINGS

- ◆ From 1992-2000, there have been 2,609 offenders admitted into the Motivational Boot Camp Program, with over 80% successfully completing the program.
- ◆ Offenders are most likely to come from Philadelphia [23%] and Allegheny [11%] Counties, and to be convicted of a drug offense [71%].
- ◆ Most offenders entering Boot Camp are young [mean age of 25 years], non-white [61%], male [97%], single [77%], with a high school education [60%].
- ◆ Over half of the offenders [53%] had used drugs the day of their offense, and 65% have tried to quit using drugs.
- ◆ Overall, offenders reported that they benefited from Boot Camp and were optimistic about their future.
- ◆ After graduating from Boot Camp, offenders were more likely to be employed [73% vs. 57%] and less likely to use drugs [17% vs. 78%] than prior to attending Boot Camp.
- ◆ Six months after graduating from Boot Camp offenders reported that drugs were less likely to cause them problems with the law, present difficulties in their thinking or work, affect their health, or make their lives worse.
- ◆ Offenders made significant improvements in their decision-making skills after going through the program, though this did not appear to have an impact on future recidivism.
- ◆ Offenders who were better educated, employed, in school, older at first arrest, and/or had never used drugs, were less likely to have technical violations or commit new crimes while on parole.

<b>Table 1. Number of Offenders Statutorily Eligible, Recommended, and Admitted into Boot Camp [1992-2000].</b>											
<b>COUNTY</b>	<b>Number eligible by statute</b>	<b>Number referred by judge</b>	<b>Number admitted by DOC</b>	<b>COUNTY</b>	<b>Number eligible by statute</b>	<b>Number referred by judge</b>	<b>Number admitted by DOC</b>	<b>COUNTY</b>	<b>Number eligible by statute</b>	<b>Number referred by judge</b>	<b>Number admitted by DOC</b>
<b>Adams</b>	174	14	16	<b>Elk</b>	53	4	2	<b>Montour</b>	39	1	3
<b>Allegheny</b>	1927	253	277	<b>Erie</b>	1141	278	135	<b>Northampton</b>	194	39	21
<b>Armstrong</b>	64	8	4	<b>Fayette</b>	472	73	48	<b>Northumberland</b>	241	38	16
<b>Beaver</b>	212	31	22	<b>Forest</b>	16	3	2	<b>Perry</b>	82	18	12
<b>Bedford</b>	23	1	1	<b>Franklin</b>	324	44	34	<b>Philadelphia</b>	4906	1080	604
<b>Berks</b>	1101	182	105	<b>Fulton</b>	32	9	5	<b>Pike</b>	52	9	3
<b>Blair</b>	96	4	2	<b>Greene</b>	135	9	8	<b>Potter</b>	39	11	2
<b>Bradford</b>	188	5	11	<b>Huntingdon</b>	18	2	6	<b>Schuylkill</b>	98	5	3
<b>Bucks</b>	287	6	5	<b>Indiana</b>	94	21	13	<b>Snyder</b>	107	15	2
<b>Butler</b>	141	12	9	<b>Jefferson</b>	45	10	12	<b>Somerset</b>	167	29	10
<b>Cambria</b>	183	49	17	<b>Juniata</b>	20	3	0	<b>Sullivan</b>	24	4	1
<b>Cameron</b>	8	0	2	<b>Lackawanna</b>	411	22	24	<b>Susquehanna</b>	37	3	0
<b>Carbon</b>	88	16	4	<b>Lancaster</b>	395	37	65	<b>Tioga</b>	70	13	13
<b>Centre</b>	132	22	22	<b>Lawrence</b>	195	3	3	<b>Union</b>	72	14	8
<b>Chester</b>	379	78	72	<b>Lebanon</b>	148	4	5	<b>Venango</b>	222	45	34
<b>Clarion</b>	44	8	8	<b>Lehigh</b>	683	148	93	<b>Warren</b>	78	28	13
<b>Clearfield</b>	159	12	11	<b>Luzerne</b>	147	10	19	<b>Washington</b>	125	8	11
<b>Clinton</b>	50	10	3	<b>Lycoming</b>	544	141	91	<b>Wayne</b>	84	14	10
<b>Columbia</b>	40	5	0	<b>McKean</b>	67	10	10	<b>Westmoreland</b>	256	22	25
<b>Crawford</b>	143	31	14	<b>Mercer</b>	382	76	46	<b>Wyoming</b>	50	9	4
<b>Cumberland</b>	268	43	21	<b>Mifflin</b>	40	2	5	<b>York</b>	691	147	125
<b>Dauphin</b>	1442	141	150	<b>Monroe</b>	151	2	6				
<b>Delaware</b>	975	200	201	<b>Montgomery</b>	745	79	80	<b>TOTAL</b>	22016	3673	2609

Note: Some counties have more admissions than referrals, which is most likely a result of the DOC contacting the judge about potentially good candidates who had not initially received a judicial referral for Boot Camp. These referrals would not be indicated on the Guideline Sentence Form.

### Who Goes to Boot Camp?

Statute requires that the judge recommend potential offenders, who then voluntarily apply to the program upon arrival at the Department of Corrections [DOC]. The DOC makes the final determination concerning admissions to the program. The major reasons that offenders are not accepted into the program are due to medical problems and/or outstanding detainers.

Table 1 shows the number of offenders who were statutorily eligible, judicially referred, and admitted into the Boot Camp Program from 1992-2000.<sup>1</sup> Statewide, about 17% of the statutorily eligible offenders are recommended by judges, and about 71% of those recommended are admitted into the program.

Philadelphia and Allegheny Counties have the largest number of offenders admitted into Boot Camp, representing 23% and

11% of the admissions, respectively. Though the larger counties have the most offenders attending Boot Camp, many of the rural counties have both higher rates of judicial referrals and DOC acceptances into the Boot Camp.

### Boot Camp Offender Survey

During the last two years, the Sentencing Commission, with assistance from the Department of Corrections and the Board of Probation and Parole, has been conducting a two-part Offender Survey. Part I is a Self-Report Survey, designed to include questions relevant to factors that previous studies have found to be related to criminal behavior [e.g., substance abuse, prior criminal activity, employment history, and family stability]. This survey is given to offenders upon admission to the Boot Camp and six months after graduation, when they are on parole. Part II is a Boot Camp Evaluation Survey, which measures attitudinal changes along several dimensions that are addressed through the programmatic features of the Boot Camp [e.g., self-control, motivation for change, and decision

1. The Sentencing Commission database contains the number of offenders eligible and referred to Boot Camp. The Department of Corrections provides the Boot Camp admission data.

making]. The survey is given to offenders at admission, graduation, and six months after graduation. The findings presented below are based upon the 148 offenders who graduated from the Boot Camp Program between April 2001 and July 2001 and completed the surveys at all three phases: admission, graduation, and parole.<sup>2</sup>

**Responses from the Self-Report Survey.** Responses to the Self-Report Survey indicate that the typical Boot Camp offender is young, non-white, male, unmarried, the parent of at least one child, and has completed high school [Table 2]. The vast majority of offenders had a prior criminal record and were older at first arrest [mean age of 18] than for first drug use [mean age of 15]. Prior to entering Boot Camp, 56% of the respondents reported using drugs on a daily basis, and 65% indicated that they had previously attempted to quit taking drugs. Offenders were much less likely to report using drugs on parole than prior to Boot Camp [17% vs. 78%].

After graduating from Boot Camp, offenders were more likely to be living with a parent than with a spouse/partner [37% vs. 28%], while the reverse was true prior to attending Boot Camp [24% vs. 46%]. In addition, offenders were less likely to have their children living with them when they returned to the community after Boot Camp [36% vs. 60%].

While offenders were more likely to be employed on parole than when they entered Boot Camp [73% vs. 57%], they also indicated a smaller monthly income, with 35% earning over \$1,000 a month in comparison to 68% of offenders previously reporting this income. This was most likely a reflection of the fact that many offenders cited illegal activity, rather than a job, as their major source of income prior to Boot Camp.

**Responses from Boot Camp Evaluation Survey.** The Boot Camp Evaluation Survey consisted of 101 questions and addressed six major areas: attitudes toward the Boot Camp Program, indicators of self-control, decision-making skills, motivation for treatment, association with family and friends, and opportunities for the future.

**Self-control.** One of the initial objectives of the Boot Camp was to instill self-discipline and offenders did indicate a decrease in impulsive behavior. Overall, offenders were significantly less likely to act on the spur of the moment or ignore preparing for the future, and more likely to delay immediate gratification for a distant goal after attending Boot Camp.

**Motivation for Treatment.** One of the legislative intents behind the establishment of the Boot Camp was to reduce crime by addressing the underlying problem of substance abuse. Offenders indicated that they had benefited from the program in that they were significantly less likely to view drugs as a problem at graduation than admission and even less so at the parole stage.

**Table 2. Responses from the Self-Report Surveys [N=148]**

	<u>Admission</u>	<u>Parole</u> <sup>*</sup>
<b>Mean Age</b>	25 years	-
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	97%	-
Female	3%	-
<b>Race</b>		
Black	43%	-
White	37%	-
Hispanic	18%	-
Other	2%	
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Never Married	77%	78%
Common law	9%	4%
Married	7%	10%
Widowed/Divorced	7%	7%
<b>Living Arrangements</b>		
Spouse/partner	46%	28%
Parent [s]	24%	37%
Alone	13%	15%
Other family	5%	13%
Other	12%	7%
<b>Children Living with Offender</b>		
Yes	60%	36%
No	40%	64%
<b>Employed</b>		
Yes	57%	73%
No	43%	27%
Mean monthly income over \$1,000	68%	35%
<b>Major source of income</b>		
Job	60%	83%
Illegal	35%	0%
Other	6%	17%
<b>Completed high school</b>		
Yes	60%	67%
No	41%	33%
<b>Arrested as juvenile</b>		
Yes	48%	-
No	52%	-
<b>Current offense</b>		
Drugs	71%	-
Burglary/Theft	13%	-
Robbery/Assault	11%	-
Other	5%	-
Age of first arrest [mean]	age 18	
<b>Use Drugs</b>		
Yes	78%	17%
No	22%	83%
<b>Tried to quit drugs</b>		
Yes	65%	-
No	35%	-
<b>Drug use during month prior to arrest</b>		
None	22%	-
Daily	56%	-
Once a week or less	22%	-
Age at first drug use [mean]	age 15	-
<b>Used drugs day of offense</b>		
Yes	53%	-
No	47%	-
<b>Used alcohol day of offense</b>		
Yes	28%	-
No	72%	-

<sup>\*</sup> A dash [-] indicates that the question was not asked at parole phase.  
 Note: All percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

2. This represents a 44% response rate. While this rate is consistent with that of other survey research, it should be noted that there could be significant differences between those who responded and those who did not.

Specifically, they responded that drugs were less likely to cause them problems with the law, present difficulties in their thinking or their work, affect their health, or make their lives worse.

**Family Warmth and Friends-in-Trouble.** Two of the scales used in the survey, Family Warmth and Friends-in-Trouble, were included at only the admission and parole stages. At both stages, offenders indicated a high degree of family warmth in that they felt a feeling of togetherness in their family, spent time each day with their family, ate meals together, received help with their problems, and had fun with family members.

Offenders reported significant changes, however, with respect to their friends in that they were less likely at parole than at admission to have friends who had used a weapon in a fight, been in trouble with police because of alcohol or drugs, quit school, had intentionally damaged other people’s property, or did things that would get them into trouble at work. Further, on the Self-Report Survey, 72% indicated that they had made new friends on parole, while only 23% reported that they ‘hung out’ with old friends.

**Program Expectations.** Overall, offenders had high expectations for Boot Camp, though in some areas these expectations were not always met. After going through the program, offenders were less likely to feel that they would stay out of trouble, find a job, learned self-discipline, or became a better person; attitudes that persisted on parole. Nevertheless, offenders consistently demonstrated positive attitudes toward the program at all three stages of the survey with respect to: the benefit of the substance abuse programs, respect for good drill instructors, learning new things about themselves, and having pride in being accepted into the program.

In addition, at least two-thirds of the offenders, at all three stages, were optimistic that their chances for going to college or acquiring and holding a job were good, and about 90% of the offenders responded that they would be disappointed if they ended up in prison again.

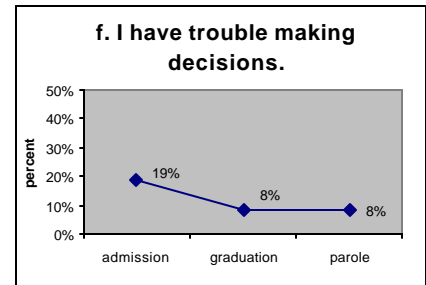
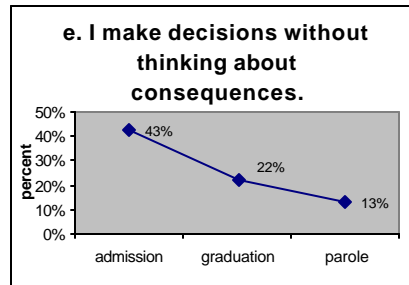
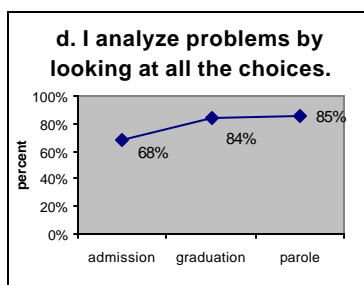
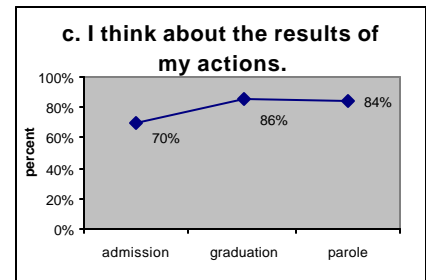
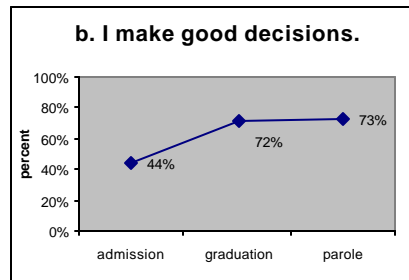
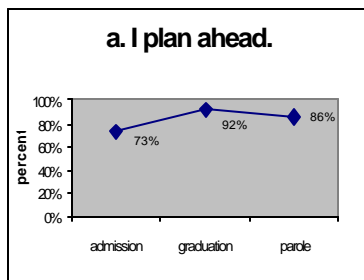
**Decision-making.** The area in which offenders appeared to experience the most change was with respect to their enhanced decision-making capabilities [Charts a-f]. After going through the program, offenders were significantly more likely to respond that they could: plan ahead, make good decisions, think about the results of their actions, and think of alternative solutions to a problem. In addition, they were significantly less likely to have trouble making decisions or to make decisions without thinking about the consequences. These positive attitudinal changes continued at the parole stage.

**Factors related to good decision-making.** As improved decision-making among offenders was one of the major findings, we next examined whether there were factors related to making good decisions.<sup>3</sup> Overall, what we found was that there are attributes related to good decision-making, and that those offenders who made the greatest improvement in their decision-making were ones less likely to have those attributes at admission.

One of the strongest factors related to good decision-making was religiosity—the extent to which religion influenced the way the offender lived his/her life. The stronger this influence,

3. For this analysis we used the responses from the 546 offenders who completed the survey at both admission and graduation during the time period the study. We dichotomized the decision-making scale into ‘low vs. high’ and used a factor loading of .500 as the cut-off for item inclusion. The reliability for the scale was .8117.

Charts a-f. Percentage of offenders who agreed/strongly agreed with questions on decision-making scale.\*



\* There were significant changes [ $p \leq .05$ ] in the responses to these questions between admission and graduation and admission and parole.

the better the decision-making skills. We also found that offenders with prior criminal activity, who had friends incarcerated, were themselves incarcerated as juveniles, and were younger at first arrest ranked lower on the decision-making scale than their counterparts. In addition, offenders who were drinking the day of the crime, used drugs, were younger at first drug use, and used drugs more frequently exhibited greater difficulty with decision-making. Thus, it appears that offenders with low decision-making skills are also demonstrating poor decisions with respect to their criminal activity, friends, and substance abuse.

*Thinking for Change Program.* In July 2000, the Boot Camp implemented the National Institute of Correction's *Thinking for Change* Program, which offers a blend of cognitive restructuring, social skills development, and problem solving skills. Offenders are taught to identify thinking and actions that can lead to criminal behavior and how to replace these with pro-social attitudes and behavior. The program includes lessons to teach enhanced decision-making capabilities such as: problem solving, setting a goal, choices and consequences of one's actions, making appropriate decision, and evaluating those decisions.

Our finding concerning improved decision-making skills among offenders going to Boot Camp may indicate that the *Thinking for Change* program is having the intended positive impact of changing the offender's approach to problem solving. However, as we do not have survey responses from offenders who attended the Boot Camp prior to the implementation of the program, we can only speculate that it is this specific aspect of the Boot Camp that results in the improved decision making.

**Recidivism of Boot Camp Offenders**

A major purpose behind the creation of Pennsylvania's Motivational Boot Camp was to reduce criminal behavior. We found in a previous study that that there was no significant difference in the recidivism of offenders who graduate from Boot Camp compared to those who are released from prison [2000 Report to the Legislature]. However, many important changes have occurred since that study, including a mandatory aftercare program for all graduates. Thus, the Commission will be conducting another recidivism study in the coming year to examine the effectiveness of the new aftercare program on crime reduction.

This year, however, we examined the relationship between recidivism and some of the factors included on the Boot Camp offender survey.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, we defined recidivism as having a technical violation [both charges and revocations] or a new crime [both charges and convictions]. The sample included 304 offenders who entered Boot Camp between

April 2001 and December 2002, which allowed for a tracking period ranging from 10-18 months.

Table 3 presents those factors that we found to be significantly related to recidivism.<sup>5</sup> Overall, 65% of the offenders were successful on parole, with 18% committing a new crime and 17% having a technical violation.

5. It should be noted that the analyses were conducted only at the bivariate level. As possible correlations may exist between some of the variables, findings may differ in a multivariate analysis. A larger sample size in the coming year will permit us to conduct this analysis.

**Table 3. Factors Significantly Related to Recidivism [N=304].\***

	Success	Technical Violation	New Crime	Total Number
<b>OVERALL</b>	65%	17%	18%	[304]
<b>RACE</b>				
White	73%	16%	11%	[ 94]
Non-white	61%	18%	21%	[208]
<b>COUNTY</b>				
Phil/Alleg	60%	17%	22%	[121]
Other urban	63%	20%	17%	[123]
Rural	71%	14%	14%	[ 42]
Out of state	100%			[ 18]
<b>EDUCATION</b>				
Less than high school	60%	21%	20%	[131]
High school/Technical school	63%	17%	20%	[119]
Some college or degree	84%	9%	7%	[ 41]
<b>EMPLOYMENT</b>				
[admission]				
Employed	72%	11%	17%	[160]
In school and employed	73%	12%	15%	[ 34]
Unemployed	51%	28%	21%	[107]
<b>MAJOR SOURCE OF INCOME</b>				
Illegal	60%	22%	18%	[ 93]
Job	74%	14%	12%	[109]
<b>FAMILY MEMBER IN JAIL</b>				
Yes	61%	18%	21%	[160]
No	72%	15%	13%	[133]
<b>FRIEND IN JAIL</b>				
Yes	63%	19%	18%	[254]
No	79%	9%	12%	[ 43]
<b>JUVENILE INCARCERATION</b>				
Yes	56%	22%	22%	[105]
No	71%	14%	15%	[192]
<b>AGE AT FIRST ARREST</b>				
14 and under	46%	27%	27%	[ 63]
15-17	70%	15%	16%	[ 82]
18-20	66%	20%	14%	[ 71]
21 and up	81%	8%	11%	[ 64]
<b>EVER USE DRUGS</b>				
Yes	64%	18%	19%	[254]
No	80%	13%	8%	[ 40]
<b>ATTEMPT TO QUIT</b>				
Yes	61%	19%	20%	[201]
No	67%	11%	12%	[ 65]
<b>PERSONAL BENEFITS</b>				
[graduation]				
Low	70%	20%	11%	[132]
High	63%	14%	23%	[154]
<b>FAMILY WARMTH</b>				
[admission]				
Low	59%	22%	19%	[134]
High	72%	13%	16%	[158]

\* These factors significant at p ≤ .05 level.  
 Note: All percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

4. The Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole provided the recidivism data for the analysis.

The Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing  
 P.O. Box 1200  
 State College PA 16804-1200  
 Phone: (814) 863-2797  
 Fax: (814) 863-2129  
 Web: <http://pcs.la.psu.edu>

Frank Dermody, Chair  
*State Representative*

Steven L. Chanenson                      Merritt E. 'Ted' McKnight  
*Law Professor*                              *District Attorney*

Michael T. Conahan                      Mark S. McNaughton  
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Jay Costa, Jr.                              William T.C. Tully  
*State Senator*                              *Defense Attorney*

Renee Cardwell Hughes                      Jeannine Turgeon  
*Judge*    *Judge*

Jeffrey A. Manning                      Mary Jo White  
*Judge*    *State Senator*

Mark H. Bergstrom  
*Executive Director*

The Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing is an agency of the General Assembly located on the University Park campus of the Pennsylvania State University. The Commission was created in 1978 for the primary purpose of creating a consistent and rational statewide sentencing policy to promote fairer and more uniform sentencing practices.

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Offenders were significantly more likely to recidivate if they were non-white, unemployed, less educated, from an urban area, had used drugs, were younger at first arrest, and lacked family warmth. Consistent with our previous study, one of the strongest relationships we found was between employment status and recidivism, with offenders who had been employed prior to Boot Camp being much less likely to recidivate after Boot Camp.

Similar to other research findings, we found that offenders were more likely to recidivate if they had previously associated with friends who had been incarcerated and lacked strong family bonds. Offenders who never used drugs were less likely to recidivate, though neither frequency of drug use nor age of onset was found to be significantly related to recidivism.

Interestingly, offenders who reported benefiting most from the program had a higher rate of new crime charges, though a lower rate of technical violations. This could perhaps reflect

an overly optimistic view among the more serious recidivist offenders that the Boot Camp would offer a panacea for their problems .

Previously we reported that that offenders acquired better decision-making skills after going through Boot Camp. This enhanced decision-making, however, did not seem to impact their criminal activity. Though offenders who had better decision making skills were less likely to recidivate, this finding was not significant.

A caveat to our findings is the concern about the accuracy of self-report information, particularly when sensitive information about criminal activity and substance abuse is involved. The fact that previous research has found that offenders tend to be accurate in their reporting, in tandem with our findings that most offenders have admitted to committing previous crimes and using illegal substances, gives us some confidence that the information obtained via the Offender Survey is credible.

**Full Report Available.** The entire report upon which this Research Bulletin is based, *Pennsylvania's Motivational Boot Camp: 2002 Legislative Report*, can be found on the Commission's website <http://pcs.la.psu.edu> or obtained by contacting Cathy Dittman at the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing at [814] 863-2797, ext. 1 or [cwd2@psu.edu](mailto:cwd2@psu.edu). If you have questions concerning the report, please contact Dr. Cynthia Kempinen at [814] 863-2543 or [cak16@psu.edu](mailto:cak16@psu.edu).