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Attitudinal and Behavioral Changes among Pennsylvania's Boot Camp Graduates: A Summary of the 2003 Legislative Report

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In 1990, the Pennsylvania Legislature passed Act 215, which established Pennsylvania's Motivational Boot Camp Program. This Act also mandated the Sentencing Commission to report annually on the progress of the Boot Camp Program. This edition of the *Research Bulletin* is a summary of the 2003 *Legislative Report*, which presented findings from a survey measuring attitudinal and behavior changes that occurred among Boot Camp graduates.

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 opened in June 1992, with 39 offenders being admitted into the program that year. In 2001, the Boot Camp admitted 470 offenders, with a new platoon of approximately 50 offenders arriving nearly every month.

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 a.m. 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.

To be accepted into the Boot Camp Program, potential candidates must meet the statutory eligibility criteria and be recommended by the sentencing judge, with the Department of Corrections making the final determination concerning admissions. The program is voluntary and has a high graduation rate, with 88% successfully graduating from the program. Offenders who voluntarily or involuntarily 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.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- ◆ The typical Boot Camp offender is a young, non-white, male, from an urban area.
- ◆ Most offenders entering Boot Camp had completed high school and were employed. While the majority of offenders identified their jobs as their primary source of income, over a third indicated that they obtained their income primarily through illegal means.
- ◆ Most offenders reported having a family member and knowing a friend who had been incarcerated.
- ◆ The vast majority of offenders used drugs at some point with an average age of onset being 15 years. Marijuana and cocaine were the predominant drugs used in the last year. A slight majority used drugs the day they committed their offense..
- ◆ Upon graduating from Boot Camp, offenders indicated that were less impulsive, had better decision-making skills, and had fewer problems with drugs. Additionally, all of these changes endured after offenders were on parole for six months..
- ◆ After Boot Camp, offenders were more likely to be employed full-time and less likely to use drugs or alcohol. Most offenders made new friends, did not 'hang-out' with their old friends, and associated with fewer friends who had been in trouble with 'the law.'
- ◆ About 19% of the Boot Camp graduates in the study had been arrested for a new crime during the tracking period, which ranged from 7-26 months.
- ◆ The greatest predictors of re-arrest were race, employment status, type of friends, and length of tracking time. Offenders were more likely to be re-arrested for crime if they were Black, unemployed, associating with 'friends-in-trouble', and were on parole for a longer period of time.

Table 2. Boot Camp Offender Characteristics
[N=353]

Mean Age	25 years
Gender	
Male	97%
Female	3%
Race	
White	36%
Non-white	64%
County	
Philadelphia	25%
Allegheny	18%
Other Urban	40%
Rural	16%
Marital Status	
Married	8%
Common law	9%
Single	83%
Living Arrangements	
Spouse/partner	45%
Parent [s]	26%
Other	29%
Have Children	
Yes	59%
No	41%
Employed	
Yes	64%
No	36%
Major Source of Income	
Job	56%
Illegal	37%
Other	8%
Completed High School	
Yes	52%
No	48%
Current Offense	
Drugs	70%
Property	13%
Personal	11%
Other	6%
Mean Age at First Arrest	age 18
Family Member Ever Incarcerated	
Yes	53%
No	47%
Friend Ever Incarcerated	
Yes	86%
No	14%
Ever Used Drugs	
Yes	89%
No	11%
Mean Age at first drug use	age 15
Type of Drugs Used [check all that apply]	
Marijuana	84%
Cocaine	34%
LSD	17%
Barbiturates	12%
PCP	10%
Used Drugs Day of Offense	
Yes	54%
No	46%
Used Alcohol Day of Offense	
Yes	28%
No	72%

Note: Some respondents did not answer all questions. All percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Boot Camp Offender Survey

During the last three 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-making]. This survey is given to offenders at admission, graduation, and six months after graduation. The sample for the current study consisted of 353 offenders who graduated from the Boot Camp between April 2001 and May 2002 and responded to the survey at all three phases.¹

Boot Camp Offender Characteristics

Table 1 provides the demographic, criminal justice, and substance abuse characteristics of Boot Camp graduates as reported on the Self-Report Survey at admission. The typical Boot Camp offender is young [mean age of 25], non-white [64%], male [97%], from an urban area [84%], single [83%], and has at least one child [59%]. Most offenders had completed high school [52%] and were employed [64%], with 56% indicating that their job was their major source of income, though 37% reported that their income primarily came from illegal sources. The majority had friends [86%] and family members [53%] who had been incarcerated. Most offenders were in Boot Camp for drug convictions [70%], and even more [89%] indicated that they had used drugs at some point in their lives, with 52% reporting that they were using drugs the day they committed their crime. The drugs most frequently used the year before their arrest were marijuana [84%] and cocaine [34%]. Offenders reported being younger [average age of 15 years] when they first tried drugs than when they were first arrested for a crime [average age of 18 years].

Attitudinal Changes among Boot Camp Graduates

The Boot Camp Evaluation Survey was designed to measure whether attitudinal changes occurred among graduates along several dimensions. Table 2 shows the three major areas in which positive attitudinal shifts occurred among graduates of the program: decreased impulsivity, increased decision-making skills, and less problems with substance abuse. These changes also endured at the parole stage.

Impulsiveness. As one of the legislative objectives of the Boot Camp was to instill self-discipline, we were interested in examining whether offenders gained a better sense of self-control. While the Self-Control Scale used for this study consisted of six sub-parts [impulsiveness, simple tasks, risk taking, physical activities, self-centeredness, and temper], the most significant changes were found with respect to impulsivity. Offenders were significantly more likely at admission, than at graduation and parole, to respond that they didn't devote much thought and effort to preparing for the future [20%, 5%, 10%], did what brought pleasure now even at the cost of a distant goal [31%, 21%, 16%], and acted on the spur of the moment without stopping to think [44%, 23%, 16%].

¹ Of the 709 offenders who graduated during this time period, 679 responded to the survey at the graduation phase [96%], and 368 responded at the parole phase [52%]. The 353 who responded at all three phases represents a 50% response rate. We found few statistically significant differences between offenders who responded to all three phases and those who did not, which provides some confidence that the sample is representative...

Table 2. Offenders Demonstrated Positive Attitudinal Changes. *

	Admission	Graduation	Parole
<u>Offenders report a decrease in impulsiveness:</u>			
I don't devote much thought and effort to preparing for the future.	20%	5%	10%
I often do what brings me pleasure even at the cost of a distant goal.	31%	21%	16%
I often act on the spur of the moment without stopping to think.	44%	23%	16%
<u>Offenders indicate improvement in decision making skills:</u>			
I make decisions thinking about the consequences.	49%	69%	78%
I plan ahead.	71%	88%	83%
I make good decisions.	41%	69%	71%
I don't have trouble making decisions	68%	79%	79%
I think about the results of my actions.	68%	82%	82%
I analyze problems by looking at all the choices.	66%	82%	83%
I consider how my actions will affect others.	66%	80%	79%
<u>Offenders report less problems with drugs:</u>			
My drug use is a problem for me.	38%	22%	18%
My drug use is more trouble than it is worth.	61%	39%	32%
My drug use is causing problems with the law.	53%	38%	21%
My drug use is causing problems with my health.	30%	25%	16%
My drug use is making my life worse and worse.	41%	29%	22%
My drug use is causing problems in thinking or doing my work.	40%	27%	13%

* Changes statistically significant at $\leq .001$.

Decision-making. In July 2000 the Boot Camp Program 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. Our study found evidence that the *Thinking for Change* program may be having the intended impact in that there was a pronounced improvement in the offenders' decision-making skills. After attending Boot Camp, offenders were significantly more likely to: think about the consequences of their decisions [49%, 69%, 78%], plan ahead [71%, 88%, 83%], make good decisions [41%, 69%, 71%], have less trouble making decisions [68%, 79%, 79%], think about the results of their actions [68%, 82%, 82%], analyze problems by looking at all the choices [66%, 82%, 83%], and consider how their actions affect others [66%, 80%, 79%]. However, it should be noted that we do not have survey responses from offenders who attended the Boot Camp prior the implementation of *Thinking for Change*, and thus we can only speculate that it is this specific aspect of Boot Camp that results in the improved decision-making capabilities.

Problems with Drugs. In the Boot Camp's enabling legislation, the Legislature recognized "that the frequency of convictions is attributable in part to the increased use of drugs and alcohol", and as a result mandated that the Boot Camp offer substance abuse treatment [Act 215 of 1990]. In response, a major focus of the Boot Camp has been a requirement that all offenders participate in substance abuse treatment and education. Thus, one area of the Offender Survey examined the offenders' attitudes toward their drug problem. Overall, while most offenders did not view their drug use as presenting difficulties for them when they entered the Boot Camp, a sizable percentage did indicate the negative impact that drugs were having in their lives. Further, offenders report having less problems with drugs after graduating from Boot Camp and while on parole. Table 2 shows that offenders were significantly less likely after Boot Camp than before to view drugs as being a problem for them [38%, 22%, 14%], making their lives worse [41%, 29%, 22%], creating more trouble than they were worth [51%, 39%, 32%], causing trouble with the law [53%, 38%, 21%], their work [40%, 27%, 13%], or health [30%, 25%, 16%].

Behavioral Changes Among Boot Camp Graduates

While offenders reported making positive attitudinal changes, the question arises whether these offenders also made positive behavioral changes. At the parole stage, we found that offenders were significantly more likely to be employed full-time and less likely to use drugs, and 'hang out' with their old friends—three areas that previous research has found to be related to criminal activity. Consistent with that research, we also found that offenders who were employed and less likely to associate with problematic friends were also less likely to be arrested [Table 3]. However, we also found that the positive attitudinal changes that occurred with respect to impulsivity, decision-making, and problem with drugs were not related to decreased criminal activity.

What is Next?

It is encouraging that two of the significant predictors of recidivism, employment status and type of friends, are those that are considered 'dynamic' and can be addressed through the Boot Camp Program as well as during the aftercare period. Previous research has also shown that a structured re-entry program providing for continuity of programs and services is critical to the success of an offender desisting from crime upon returning home. The Commission is currently undertaking a study to examine the impact of the aftercare program for Boot Camp graduates and next year's report will present the findings from that study.

Table 3. Arrest Rates for Boot Camp Graduates.

	No Arrest	Arrest
Overall	81%	19%
Race *		
White	89%	11%
Black	73%	27%
Hispanic	81%	19%
Age		
under 22	79%	21%
22-25	83%	18%
26-29	82%	18%
over 29	79%	21%
County		
Phil/Alleg.	76%	24%
Other urban	80%	20%
Rural	90%	10%
Employed *		
Employed	86%	14%
Unemployed	65%	37%
Current Offense		
Drug	80%	20%
Non-Drug	81%	19%
Age at First Arrest		
under 15	65%	35%
15-17	78%	22%
18-20	83%	17%
over 20	89%	11%
Used Drugs Day of Crime		
Yes	76%	24%
No	84%	16%
Mean Tracking Period * 16 months	20 months	
Means on Scales		
Friends-in-Trouble*	13.7	17.2
Impulsivity	9.0	9.2
Decision-Making	31.6	30.5
Drug Problem	15.3	14.3

* Multivariate analysis indicated that this factor was a significant predictor of re-arrest at $\leq .01$ level.

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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.

Offender Comments on Boot Camp are Positive. *

BC a thrilling experience; Opportunity to reflect and changed me forever; Thank you

BC is helpful as long as you want to help yourself

Best thing that ever happened; was exactly what was needed to straighten myself up; thank you

Great, i learned a lot and boosted my self confidence

Helped realize crime doesn't pay

I just want to say thanks to all the staff for helping me out because if it wasn't for you, i'd be locked up.

I'm doing real good out here. i have a nice job and this was my first job

I really enjoyed my experience you have an excellent GED program

It was a life-changing 6 months

Most of us led an extravagant lifestyle prior to incarceration. When released we find ourselves often working for \$6-\$7 an hour, So maybesome classes on budgeting or base financial planning

I really enjoyed my experience you have an excellent GED program

I've learned a lot of discipline that i never had. it's changed my life for the better.

The Boot Camp changed my life, my thinking skills, and relationships with friends, family, are better.

* These are the direct quotes from the offender surveys with no grammatical corrections.

Full Report Available. The entire report, *Pennsylvania's Motivational Boot Camp: 2003 Legislative Report*, by Cynthia Kempinen and Megan Kurlychek, 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.