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Pennsylvania's Motivational Boot Camp: Summary of 2000 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 included a mandate to the Sentencing Commission to report annually on the progress of the Boot Camp Program. This Bulletin provides a summary of the 2000 Legislative Report that includes: 1) information on the type of offender who was eligible, referred, and admitted to Boot Camp from 1992-1998, and 2) findings from a recidivism study of 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 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 92% of offenders educated at the Boot Camp receive their GED.

The Boot Camp opened in June 1992. By 1998, 1670 offenders had been admitted to the program, which has about an 80% graduation rate. Those who graduate from the Program are automatically released to parole supervision until the expiration of their maximum sentence. Offenders who voluntarily [13%] 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.

Currently, the Boot Camp has approximately 230 offenders with a new platoon of about 40 offenders arriving each month. In July 1999 the Boot Camp opened a newly renovated facility, which has the potential to accommodate about 400 offenders upon completion of the water and sewage upgrades.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- ◆ From 1992-1998, there have been 1,670 offenders admitted into the Motivational Boot Camp Program. About 80% have successfully completed the program, with 13% voluntarily withdrawing and 7% involuntarily removed.
- ◆ Offenders are most likely to come from Philadelphia [22%] and Allegheny [10%] Counties.
- ◆ The majority of offenders admitted to Boot Camp are convicted of drug offenses [60%], followed by burglary [11%] and theft offenses [9%].
- ◆ There was no significant difference in the recidivism rate of offenders who went to Boot Camp compared to those who went to prison. There was evidence, however, that Boot Camp graduates were more likely to commit technical violations while offenders who went to prison were more likely to commit new crimes.
- ◆ Offenders from rural counties were almost twice as likely as offenders from Philadelphia and Allegheny Counties to commit technical violations or new crime.
- ◆ Offenders who committed property offenses were almost twice as likely as other offenders to commit a technical violation or new crime.
- ◆ Younger offenders were more likely than older offenders to commit new crimes.
- ◆ **Employment status was found to be the strongest and most consistent predictor of recidivism.** Offenders who were unemployed were almost three times as likely as offenders who were employed to commit either a technical violation or new crime and over twice as likely to commit new crimes.

COUNTY	Number eligible by statute	Number referred by judge	Number admitted by DOC	COUNTY	Number eligible by statute	Number referred by judge	Number admitted by DOC	COUNTY	Number eligible by statute	Number referred by judge	Number admitted by DOC
Adams	99	11	10	Elk	33	3	1	Montour	31	0	0
Allegheny	1504	148	173	Erie	868	186	97	Northhampton	123	33	15
Armstrong	53	5	3	Fayette	357	39	29	Northumberland	176	28	9
Beaver	168	28	19	Forest	8	0	1	Perry	49	10	12
Bedford	17	1	1	Franklin	237	26	20	Philadelphia	3222	702	363
Berks	846	132	69	Fulton	26	6	4	Pike	39	3	1
Blair	69	3	2	Greene	117	9	8	Potter	30	9	2
Bradford	158	5	7	Huntingdon	9	0	3	Schuylkill	69	4	1
Bucks	223	1	3	Indiana	68	15	8	Snyder	72	10	2
Butler	90	10	6	Jefferson	34	5	8	Somerset	145	29	6
Cambria	145	31	8	Juniata	11	3	0	Sullivan	15	2	1
Cameron	4	0	2	Lackawanna	303	18	16	Susquehanna	30	3	0
Carbon	64	13	3	Lancaster	300	24	46	Tioga	44	13	13
Centre	105	18	14	Lawrence	153	2	0	Union	50	7	4
Chester	251	51	47	Lebanon	111	4	5	Venango	155	36	27
Clarion	35	8	7	Lehigh	499	125	69	Warren	65	24	12
Clearfield	118	11	6	Luzerne	103	6	12	Washington	86	2	9
Clinton	35	7	2	Lycoming	443	127	68	Wayne	50	7	5
Columbia	21	0	0	McKean	49	6	6	Westmoreland	187	7	14
Crawford	109	25	10	Mercer	285	45	23	Wyoming	38	4	3
Cumberland	201	29	12	Mifflin	30	1	3	York	493	91	77
Dauphin	1120	111	96	Monroe	115	1	4				
Delaware	708	129	122	Montgomery	595	65	41	TOTAL	16075	2517	1670

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?

Figure A shows the procedure for admission into the Boot Camp Program. 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 because they have 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 1992-1998. Statewide, about 16% of offenders statutorily eligible are recommended by judges and about 66% of those recommended are admitted into the Program.

Figure A. Procedure for Admission into Boot Camp

- Sentencing guidelines identify potential candidates ?
- Offender must meet legislative criteria ?
- Sentencing judge indicates on sentencing order and guideline sentence form offender referral to Bot Camp ?
- Potential Boot Camp candidates go to Camp Hill [male] or Muncy [female] for diagnostic and classification ?
- Offender applies to Boot Camp and DOC makes final decision ?
- Upon successful completion of six month program, offender released on parole

Philadelphia and Allegheny Counties have the largest number of offenders admitted into Boot Camp, representing 22% and 10% of the admissions, respectively. Other counties with the highest admission rates: Delaware [7%], Erie and Dauphin [6% each], York [5%], Berks, Lehigh, and Lycoming [4% each], and Chester [3%]. 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 to Boot Camp.

Table 2 presents information on the characteristics of Boot Camp offenders with respect to race, offense, age, and gender. Most of the offenders are young [average age of 25 years], Black [52%], male [96%], and convicted of drug offenses [60%].

Table 2. Boot Camp Offenders by Race, Offense, Age, and Gender

Race			Offense				Age	Male
Black	White	Hispanic	Drug	Property	Person	Other	[mean]	
52%	38%	10%	60%	20%	7%	13%	25 yrs	96%

Recidivism Study of Boot Camp Offenders

A major purpose in the establishment of Pennsylvania's Boot Camp Program was to reduce criminal behavior through a blend of discipline and rehabilitation. Prior studies on the effectiveness of boot camps nationwide have reached inconsistent findings, though most have concluded that they have not been successful in reducing crime. Previous research, however, does provide evidence that boot camp graduates are more successful when they attend programs with a strong rehabilitative component and that when they do recidivate, it is less serious [e.g. commit more technical violations than new crimes].

Study Sample and Design. In order to examine whether Pennsylvania's Boot Camp Program has been successful in reducing recidivism, the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing undertook a study, with the Department of Corrections and the Board of Probation and Parole providing us with the necessary data. The sample consisted of Boot Camp graduates from 1996 [n=250] and 1997 [n=258] and a comparison group of offenders released from prison during 1996 [n=195] and 1997 [n=337]. The comparison group was comprised of offenders who were eligible for the Program, but did not attend. In order to control for the influence of factors that previous research has found to be related to recidivism, we also obtained the following information: age, race, gender, county, education, employment, current convictions, and sentence length.

We looked at recidivism in two ways: 1) combining technical violations and new crime convictions and 2) looking at new crime convictions alone. We received this information through May 2000, which allowed us to track the offenders for a minimum of two years and up to four years, depending upon their release date.

Most of the offenders in both the Boot Camp [BC] and prison [DOC] group were male [> 97%], non-white [55%], and had an 11th grade education. There were, however, statistically significant differences between the groups in that the BC group was more likely than the DOC group to have a longer sentence and to be: young, from a rural county, employed, and convicted of a drug offense.

Findings. We conducted the analysis in two steps. First, we looked at the relationship between recidivism and each variable in the study individually. Second, we conducted a multivariate analysis to examine these relationships while controlling for the influence of the other variables.

In the initial analysis, we found that the BC group had a higher recidivism rate, largely due to the fact that they were more likely than the DOC group to have a technical violation [44% vs. 38%]. In contrast, the DOC group was more likely than the BC group to have a new crime conviction [15% vs. 12%]. Upon controlling for the influence of other factors, however, we found no relationship between recidivism and whether the offender went to Boot Camp or prison.

Table 3 shows the percentage of offenders who had technical violations or new convictions for the variables found to be significant

predictors of recidivism in the multivariate analysis. In looking at technical violations and new convictions combined, we found significant differences with respect to employment, offense, county, and maximum sentence. Offenders were more likely to recidivate if they were unemployed, convicted of a property crime, from a rural county, and/or had a long maximum sentence. In looking only at new crime convictions, we found that younger offenders were more likely to recidivate as well as those who were unemployed.

Employment status was the most consistent and significant predictor of recidivism. Those offenders who were unemployed were almost three times as likely to recidivate when looking at both technical violations and new crimes. Unemployed offenders were almost twice as likely to commit a new crime.

Conclusion. While the findings from this study suggest that Boot Camp does not reduce criminal behavior, there is evidence that their recidivism is of a less serious nature. That is, Boot Camp graduates are more likely than offenders released from prison to commit technical violations and less likely to commit new crimes. The most significant finding was that employed offenders are much more likely to desist from crime. A notable caveat, however, is that the sample differences between the BC and DOC group require that caution be applied to the findings. As this research is an on-going project, future analyses can examine the extent to which these differences impact the findings.

Table 3. Percentage of offenders who had technical violations or new crime convictions for the variables found to be significant predictors of recidivism. *

	Technical Violation	New Crime
Age - Release		
<21	31%	21%
22-25	28%	12%
26-29	27%	12%
30-35	24%	11%
County		
Phil/Alleg	24%	12%
Urban	29%	14%
Rural	31%	16%
Employment		
Employed	20%	9%
Unemployed	37%	20%
Offense		
Drug	25%	11%
Property	32%	22%
Other	28%	12%
Max. Sentence		
≤36 months	20%	13%
>36 months	28%	14%

* These variables were found to be statistically significant

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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.

Statutory Eligibility Criteria for Boot Camp: Below are the statutory eligibility criteria for Boot Camp eligibility as required by Act 215 of 1990 and as amended by Act 86 of 1996.

- ◆ The offender is sentenced to state confinement.
- ◆ The offender is serving a term of confinement, the minimum of which is not more than two years and the maximum of which is five years or less; or the offender is serving a term of confinement, the minimum of which is not more than three years and the inmate is within two years of completing his/her minimum term.
- ◆ The offender has not reached 35 years of age at the time he/she is approved for participation.
- ◆ The offender is not subject to a sentence, the calculation of which included a deadly weapon enhancement under the sentencing guidelines.
- ◆ The offender is not serving a sentence for one or more of the following offenses: Murder, Voluntary Manslaughter, Rape, Involuntary Deviate Sexual Intercourse, Kidnapping, Robbery (F1), Sexual Assault, Aggravated Indecent Assault, Arson [(A)(1)(D)], Burglary [Home/Person Present], Robbery of a Motor Vehicle, Drug Trafficking [18 Pa.C.S. 7508 (A)(1)(iii), (A)(2)(iii), (A)(3)(iii), (A)(4)(iii)].

Full Report Available. If you would like a copy of the complete report, *Pennsylvania's Motivational Boot Camp: 2000 Legislative Report*, by Cynthia Kempinen, Ph.D. and Megan Kurlychek, M.S., please contact Cathy Dittman at the Commission on Sentencing at [814] 863-2797, ext. 1 or cwd2@psu.edu. If you have questions concerning the study, please contact Dr. Cynthia Kempinen at [814] 863-2543 or cak16@psu.edu.