

CHAPTER 1

The Corrections System

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading the chapter, students should be able to:

1. Describe the range of purposes served by the corrections system.
2. Define the systems framework and explain why it is useful.
3. Name the various components of the corrections system today and describe their functions.
4. Identify at least five key issues facing corrections today.
5. Discuss what we can learn from the “great experiment of social control.”

LESSON PLAN

Correlated to PowerPoint



I. Introduction

- A. Growth of the system has changed how much people know about corrections.
 1. During 2015, almost half the states in the U.S. reduced the number of people in prison.
 2. In 1973, the prison incarceration rate was 96 per 100,000 Americans.
 3. By 2010, after 38 years of steady growth, the U.S. imprisonment rate reached 500 per 100,000 Americans. Correctional budgets had grown by more than 600 percent.
 4. There are now nearly 3,000 people on death row with another 206,000 serving life sentences.
 5. With prisons and jails, there are almost 2.3 million people incarcerated.
 6. Nearly 3% of Americans are now in the corrections system—prisons, jails, probation, parole, or community corrections.
 7. In 2010, the corrections system held fewer people than the year before—something that had not happened in more than 30 years.
 8. By 2015, the prison incarceration rate had fallen to 480 per 100,000, a 5 percent reduction from the peak.
 9. More than 6.7 million Americans are currently in the correctional system.
 - a. Some worry that some groups are affected more than others.
 - i. African Americans are five times more likely to be in prison than whites.
 - ii. Nearly 12 percent of African American men aged 20–40 are under some form of correctional control. One in six has been to prison.

- iii. Nearly one-third of all African American high school dropouts are in the correctional system.
- b. Correction costs are nearly \$80 billion per year.

Media Tool

Visit <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>

- The Bureau of Justice Statistics: A major source of criminal justice data.
- Research your state's statistics regarding correctional inmates and discuss this in class.

See Assignment 1

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II. The Purpose of Corrections

Learning Objective 1: Describe the range of purposes served by the corrections system.

- A. The term *corrections* usually refers to any action applied to individuals who have been accused or convicted of a crime.
- B. Corrections also includes actions applied to people who have been accused—but not yet convicted—of criminal offenses.
- C. Corrections thus encompasses all the legal responses of society to some prohibited behavior.
- D. Correctional activities are performed by public and private organizations.
- E. Three basic concepts of Western criminal law define the purpose and procedure of criminal justice.
 - 1. Offense
 - 2. Guilt
 - 3. Punishment

Class Discussion/Activity

Have each person in the class come up with a two-word phrase to describe corrections. Write them on the board and comment on the phrases while highlighting some of the topics that will be discussed throughout the semester.

See Assignment 2

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III. A Systems Framework for Studying Corrections

Learning Objective 2: Define the systems framework and explain why it is useful.

- 1. A system is a complex whole consisting of interdependent parts whose operations are directed toward common goals and influenced by the environment in which they function.
- 2. The various components of criminal justice—police, prosecutors, courts, corrections—function as a system.

- B. Goals
 - 1. Fair punishment and community protection define the purpose of corrections.
 - 2. They also serve as criteria by which we evaluate the benefits of correctional work.
 - 3. When these twin functions do not correspond, corrections faces goal conflict.

What If Scenario

Imagine you are in charge of a prison system. What would be the goal of your organization and what programs would you have in place for incarcerated individuals?

- C. Interconnectedness
 - 1. Corrections can be viewed as a series of processes: sentencing, classification, supervision, programming, and revocation.
 - 2. Processes in one part of the system affect, in both large and small ways, processes in the rest of the system.
 - 3. Processes affect one another because of the flow of people through the corrections process.
- D. Environment
 - 1. Corrections has a reciprocal relationship with its environment: Its practices affect the community, and community values and expectations will affect corrections.
 - 2. If the prison system provides inadequate drug treatment, people return to the community with the same drug problems they had when they were locked up.
- E. Feedback
 - 1. Systems learn, grow, and improve based on feedback received about their effectiveness.
 - 2. Corrections has trouble obtaining useful feedback.
- F. Complexity
 - 1. Thirty years ago, the traditional three Ps—probation, prisons, and parole—dominated correctional practice.
 - 2. Today, all kinds of activities come under the heading of corrections.
 - 3. Correctional clients are supervised by various service agencies operating at different levels and branches of government.

Class Discussion/Activity

Group students into clusters of 3–6. Tell students that they are to assume the role of the sentencing authority. Tell them that Person X has been convicted of Crime X and that they must come up with a sentence and indicate what they are trying to achieve with the sentence. Almost immediately, students will ask for more details about the incident, the person who committed the crime, the victim, etc. Tell them more. After they've decided on their sentence, change a variable about the person who committed the crime or the victim (such as criminal history, age, gender, or mental capacity). Have them determine the sentence again. You could

keep going with this, but ultimately, you will want to poll the groups to see the sentences. Some groups may keep their sentences the same despite changing variables. You may even find great differences among the groups with the sentences given. This activity offers great opportunities to introduce sentencing-related topics such as presentence investigation reports, laws surrounding habitual criminal behavior, jails vs. prisons, interagency connectivity, and so forth.

See Assignment 3

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IV. The Corrections System Today

Learning Objective 3: Name the various components of the corrections system today and describe their functions.

- A. Employs over 700,000 people—administrators, psychologists, counselors, officers, social workers, and others.
 - 1. Average annual cost of over \$81 billion.
- B. Power and responsibility divided between national and state governments.
 - 1. That the United States is a representative democracy complicates corrections.
 - 2. Corrections encompasses a major commitment on the part of American society to deal with people convicted of criminal law violations.
 - 3. Spending for corrections has risen more dramatically than for any other state function.
 - 4. Many states now spend more on corrections than on all public higher education.
 - 5. 110 federal prisons and about 1,000 state prisons (jails operated mainly by local governments)

Class Discussion/Activity

Critical thinking: Is it fair to let financial pressures determine how much we are willing to spend to promote justice and public safety? Do we need to consider other issues to determine whether the U.S. corrections system is too large? What might some of those reasons be? Are they more important than money?

- C. The Big Three in Corrections
 - 1. California used to have the largest prison population in the United States, but it has dramatically decreased since a number of reforms were implemented.
 - 2. As of 2012, Texas now has the nation's largest prison system. Due to the threat of federal fines, the Texas prison population has declined each year.
 - 3. Florida makes prison more of a priority in sentencing than other states do. But since a peak in 2010, Florida's prison population has also declined.

Media Tool

Visit <http://www.bop.gov/>

- Federal Bureau of Prisons: A look at the federal prison system.
- As a class, discuss how society could assist in the deterrence of criminal activity.

What If Scenario

What if you were a university student in Japan considering traveling to the U.S. for a year of study? How might statistics on the rate of incarceration in the U.S. affect your decision? What impression would that give you about American life? What concerns might you have?

See Assignment 4

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V. Key Issues in Corrections

Learning Objective 4: Identify at least five key issues facing corrections today.

Learning Objective 5: Discuss what we can learn from the “great experiment in social control.”

- A. Managing the Correctional Organization
 1. Goals—Inherent in the term “corrections” is the assumption that offenders can be “corrected”; this is much in dispute.
 2. Funding—At all political levels, the correctional system is only one of many services operated by government and paid for by tax revenues; corrections must vie for funding.
 - a. Corrections does not always get the funding it needs.
 - b. An even greater difficulty stems from the perceived undesirability of correctional clients.
 3. Bureaucracy—Michael Lipsky’s vivid portrait of the problems facing correctional workers: street-level bureaucrats are public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs.
 4. Interagency Coordination—managing correctional agencies is further complicated because most corrections systems comprise several loosely related organizations that are themselves bureaucracies.
- B. Working with People
 1. “People work” is central to corrections since the raw material of the system consists of people (staff and people who have committed a crime).
 2. Professional Versus Nonprofessional Staff—probation officers, correctional officers, counselors, and others.
 - a. Professionals include psychologists, counselors, and administrators (college-educated with at least one degree).
 - b. Nonprofessional staff include officers and others with a high school education.

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What If Scenario

If you decided to work within a prison system, what job would you choose and why?

- C. Uncertain Technologies
 - 1. The technologies of corrections are not as sophisticated as those of engineering, and their subjects—human beings—are complex.
 - 2. Methods of effectively dealing with offenders are highly uncertain even with the increased knowledge of human behavior during the past century.
 - 3. Various approaches such as group therapy, behavior modification and anger management remain in doubt.
- D. Exchange
 - 1. A key facet of corrections is the degree of interdependence between staff and the people they deal with.
 - 2. The unarmed, outnumbered correctional officers assigned to jail or prison have surprisingly little raw power with which to exact cooperative behavior.
 - 3. Staff and the people they are responsible for are part of an exchange relationship.
- E. Uncertainty About Correctional Strategies
 - 1. People in the corrections system obviously are handled in a variety of ways.
 - 2. Corrections gets its “business” not only from the courts but from itself.
 - 3. Programs that are implemented may have questionable value.
- F. Upholding Social Values
 - 1. The field of corrections is controversial and engrossing for those who study it.
 - 2. Corrections deals with a core conflict of values in our society—freedom versus social control—and it does so in ways that require people to work together.
 - 3. Size of prison population expansion is related to other expenditures the state makes.
 - a. More programs, health/education, services, incarceration funding.

Class Discussion/Activity

Despite decreased crime rates over the past 40 years, incarceration rates have risen. Debate whether the public has accurate views of crime, and discuss what factors—excluding actual crime rate data—influence the “get tough” policies and practices that have resulted in increased sentence lengths.

What If Scenario

If you wanted to raise public awareness of issues in corrections, how would you go about getting public attention in a way that doesn't falsely represent the issues?

Media Tool

Visit <http://www.thecrimereport.org/>

- The Crime Report

- To get a short summary of all the crime stories in the news, subscribe to the Criminal Justice Journalists' daily summary.
- As a class, discuss some current events which focus on corrections and criminal activity.

See Assignment 5

LECTURE NOTES

A useful way to begin studying corrections is by exploring its purpose. This provides an opportunity for rich discussion as the class explores the various issues in corrections relative to its purpose. It is also important for students to recognize that processes in one part of the system affect processes in other parts of the system and that outside forces also play a role in corrections.

For students to digest *American Corrections*, they must realize all that the system of “corrections” comprises. This book emphasizes the theme that things are not as simple as they look. Therefore, when teaching about corrections in America, it is important to convey that corrections is complex. Corrections consists of many individual components, a variety of responsibilities, and many masters. Corrections embodies multiple, often conflicting goals.

In many respects, corrections has little to do with crime. A useful way to explore this is by asking students to name all the parts, parties, and functions associated with corrections. You can write their answers on the board. Use this exercise to introduce and explore the *system* concept for studying corrections. By *system*, the authors mean a complex whole consisting of interdependent parts whose operations are directed toward common goals and influenced by the environment in which they function. Have students identify other examples of systems.

People, students included, often think they know a great deal about corrections. Ask students how big they think the corrections system in the United States is. This can help introduce the statistical realities of today's correctional landscape. It is important to convey just how distinct the United States is when it comes to punishment. This includes the size and vastness of corrections in America, expenditures included, and how profoundly the system has grown since 1973 and if this growth is projected to continue. Students should be made aware that this is an important time in American corrections and that there is an emerging consensus on all points of the political spectrum that the penal system has grown too much.

It is important for students to understand that corrections is constantly managing and responding to shifting social and political forces. These influences affect all components of corrections, from organizational management to the work that involves those persons convicted of a crime. An

example that illustrates this reality is the ever-changing philosophical goal of corrections. Is corrections a system based on vengeance? Is it a system through which people are rehabilitated? Is it merely a place to separate the wrongdoers from the law-abiders? Ask students which goals they think should be a correctional priority. Students should be made aware that despite a variety of problems, corrections is ultimately concerned with basic social values.

KEY TERMS

Prison

An institution for the incarceration of people convicted of serious crimes, usually felonies.

Jail

A facility authorized to hold pretrial detainees and sentenced misdemeanants for periods longer than 48 hours. Most jails are administered by county governments; sometimes they are part of the state government.

Corrections

The variety of programs, services, facilities, and organizations responsible for the management of individuals who have been accused or convicted of criminal offenses.

Social control

Actions and practices, of individuals and institutions, designed to induce conformity with the norms and rules of society.

System

A complex whole consisting of interdependent parts whose operations are directed toward common goals and influenced by the environment in which they function.

Federalism

A system of government in which power and responsibilities are divided between a national government and state governments.

Street-level bureaucrats

Public-service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their work, granting access to government programs and providing services within them.

Technology

A method of applying scientific knowledge to practical purposes in a particular field.

Exchange

A mutual transfer of resources based on decisions regarding the costs and benefits of alternative actions.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Over the course of the semester, have students collect articles from the local newspaper that touch upon issues raised in the textbook. Ask them to identify and discuss how correctional organizations and the community in which they live are affected by these issues. [LO 1]
2. Have students research their state's correctional facility. Have them research the changing trends in the number of people in prison over the last 10 years and determine why the number has either increased or decreased. Allow students to engage in a classroom discussion on this project. [LO 1]
3. Supply students with a budget and have them allocate funds for the three "Ps" of corrections (probation, prison, and parole) at the local, state, county, or federal levels. After they allocate the money, have them identify what correctional goal (rehabilitation, retribution, incapacitation, or justice) was being stressed through their allocation of budgetary funds. What would be the possible effects on the community as a result of allocating funds in the manner that they did? [LO 2]
4. "Recalibrating Justice: A Review of 2013 State Sentencing and Corrections Trends"
<http://www.vera.org/pubs/state-sentencing-and-corrections-trends-2013>
Have students research two states' sentencing and corrections trends, as well as the sizes, security levels, breakdowns of the populations, and services provided by the correctional facilities. Have them compare the two states in class to spark a discussion regarding the differences between the two. [LO 3]
5. In presenting the concept of "street-level bureaucrat," invite several different professionals (probation officers, corrections officers, corrections counselors, parole officers) to the classroom to discuss their roles and responsibilities, and how they perform their tasks. Ask students to have a list of questions prepared to ask the individual when they are presenting their material. After the presentation and discussion, have students choose one of the job positions of those that attended class and would fit their personality the most. Require the student to write a descriptive paper on the presentation and why they would choose that particular field over others. [LO 5]

ANSWERS TO END-OF-CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Although the answers provided below will vary from student to student, the responses should include at a minimum a discussion of the following key points.

1. Contrast the role of crime with the role of politics in the growth of corrections. Why is this contrast important?
 - Politics has a more significant impact on corrections growth than crime rates.
 - Corrections has grown even as crime rates have declined.
 - Examples of politics influencing corrections will vary.
 - Consider politics as influencing the “get tough” reaction to crime.
2. What do you see as some of the advantages and disadvantages of the systems concept of correction?
 - Responses will be individualized.
 - Advantages include having a useful framework with which to examine and understand the multiple components of corrections and to describe how events in one element affect other elements.
 - Disadvantages include presenting a misleading title for viewing an imperfect “system” that could suggest that the components of the system are cohesive parts of a singular whole, with shared objectives.
3. Corrections is a system in which technologies of uncertain validity are used. What are some of the dangers of using these technologies? What safeguards, if any, should be applied?
 - Methods of dealing effectively with people who’ve committed a crime are highly uncertain.
 - Correctional technologies are not as sophisticated as those associated with other fields, but their subjects—human beings—are far more complex.
 - There should not be expectations that results/effects will be universal or consistently and completely reliable.
4. Assume that the legislature has stipulated that rehabilitation should be the goal of corrections in your state. How might people working in the system displace this goal?
 - An emphasis on punishment would serve to displace any goals of rehabilitation.
 - People who work in prisons and as parole officers would not, necessarily, extend great efforts to assist with rehabilitative efforts if they felt, in the long run, it would only serve to lessen society’s needs for those in their profession.
5. What does Lipsky mean by the term *street-level bureaucrat*? Give some examples of how street-level bureaucrats act.
 - The term refers to public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs.
 - Examples will vary.
6. Suppose you are the commissioner of corrections for your state. Which correctional activities might come with your domain? Which most likely would not?

- Responses will vary.