

# **Will They Recognize My Lecture in the Field? The Juvenile Corrections Critical Assessment Tour Applied Learning Experience**

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*In the summer of 2008 a multi-disciplinary group of university students were provided an opportunity to tour on-site and observe facility staff in the course of their daily activities. Unlike the usual internship experience, the Juvenile Corrections Critical Assessment Tour allowed students access to nine juvenile facilities in four different states. Students were able to identify and evaluate personal preferences in system, facility, and mentor practices in a condensed four week period. Student-to-student and student-to-practitioner debriefings about specific observations in the facilities greatly enhanced the experience, creating a unique and effective workplace learning opportunity. By tightening the coupling between faculty in higher education and practitioners in the field, students were able to observe and explore lecture materials with the benefit of firsthand experience.*

The US Juvenile Justice System is not a system. It is a decentralized group of agencies bound by a vague composition of beliefs, but sharing the trend of being unsatisfied with the way things are—thus initiating on-going reform. Despite demographic similarities, even states who share borders practice an extremely diverse menagerie of legal responses to acts of youth.

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So begins my initial lecture in Introduction to Juvenile Justice. Being a former practitioner, I have the benefit of supplementing such dry lectures with firsthand experience, but I do limit this practice for several reasons. First, my experience is restricted to only a handful of states in the US. Second, students entering the vast juvenile justice arena could only be provided one aspect of the field: my experience in youth secure care. But more importantly, my experience is simply that—filtered through my own processing, bias, and even selective recall. A lecture hall does not allow the events and circumstances leading to decision-making to be fully demonstrated for students. This prevents students from challenging or processing the given claims. In addition, the foundation of the individual student's knowledge or the wide array of student learning styles makes this task even more difficult for the instructor in a classroom. Providing students the opportunity to view firsthand the dilemmas they will face in their chosen field, while still maintaining a safe and effective learning environment, is indeed a daunting endeavor but extremely beneficial in creating the academic professional needed in such challenging fields as criminal justice.

### LEARNING THROUGH APPLIED LEARNING

As an andragogical method, applied learning experiences in higher education are viewed as potentially effective means for students to interpret, process, and retain classroom instruction (Sims, 2006; Wolff & Tinney, 2006; Bailey, Hughes & Moore, 2004). Students who participate in these numerous types of learning activities tend to take less time to graduate and be more satisfied in their vocation once they are employed (Wimshurst & Allard, 2007). If done well, these courses can provide students career exploration, increased skills and vocational social competence, as well as motivate students to complete the educational entrance requirements of their field (Hughes, Moore, & Bailey, 1999;

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Bailey et al., 2004). Students who participate in these experiences seem to have a better understanding of what will be expected of them in their field of choice, eliminating much of the initial shock their new workplace will create (Sgroi & Ryniker, 2002).

To prepare students to interact properly in the field, faculty must be aware of the details of the environment where the student will be placed (Hughes et al., 1999; Bailey et al., 2004). The communication lines between student and practitioner should be made as level as possible if students are to learn from the environment they are placed in. "If done well," these learning experiences can have the desired effect, but design must be a primary consideration of the developer (Hughes et al., 1999). Educators who make use of these types of learning experiences have heard much about the disjuncture between higher education and field experience. Traditional educational and workplace learning appear quite different at first glance. Education endorses and rewards individual problem solving, whereas this is rarely the case in a work environment, especially social services (Bailey et al., 2004). Primarily the necessity of building group or social relations to accomplish a given task is rarely rewarded in higher education. Higher education should focus its efforts on preparing people to be good adaptive social learners, so that they can perform effectively when situations are unpredictable and task demands change (Resnick, 1987). How to better couple both the workplace experience and what the students take from their education during these field experiences may be a better focus of research and course development.

A one-size-fits-all style of instruction does not suffice in the classroom and will limit the possibilities for student engagement in workplace-centered coursework. Learning styles differ for students as well as in disciplines. Using the Learning Style Inventory (LSI), Kolb and Kolb (1999) found students and even their vocational/educational area of choice to have identifiable tendencies. For instance, Kolb, Boyatzis and Mainemelis (2001) reported that students who favor the social service vocation were more apt to fall in a *diverging style* of learning, learning best in a group or brainstorming type forum. Those scoring high in *assimilating style* were found to favor hard sciences and preferred individualized reading assignments and lecture. Students with *converging styles* preferred simulations or experiments and were more likely to be in the fields of technology. Finally, *accommodating style* learners favored hands-on experience and relied more on instinct than logic. These students were found in management or business vocations. Developing educational experiences which can juxtapose different styles of learning can allow students to become active problem solvers, having built the ability to utilize different and sometimes uncomfortable methods to resolve tasks when in their field.

Allowing students in applied learning experiences to process alone what they view in the field is problematic. Educators tend to rely on the often misguided notion that all students will be able to recognize the use of theories or paradigms discussed in the classroom (Sgroi & Ryniker, 2002; Bailey et al., 2004). Kolb and Kolb (2005) refer to *a cycle of learning*, being a combination of “grasping and transforming experience” (p. 194). Simplified, this cycle provides concrete examples, enriched by reflection given meaning by thinking and transformed by action. In essence, the cycle of learning described is not a typology but a process. Learning begins with the student identifying current beliefs or perceptions made real by interactions with others. The synergistic transaction between the environment and the student beliefs or observation is put in motion when conversation occurs. In workplace learning this should occur reflectively, both in the field and in the classroom.

### **APPLIED LEARNING IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE EDUCATION**

Universities have actively pursued the mission to develop and market applied learning experiences for students (Bailey et al., 2004). Criminal justice departments have a long history of using internships and practica to allow students to see firsthand the diverse field of criminal justice. This is often dubbed “a real world experience”—a somewhat concerning phrase—suggesting what higher education does in the classroom resembles nothing more than spouting unusable fiction to an audience. This is a very disturbing notion to one who remains passionate about the field of juvenile justice. Helping students process and develop as they experience their chosen field should be the essence of a true applied learning experience, as well as a lecture hall. Maintaining a vigilant watch over the relevancy of facts provided these future professionals is a responsibility entrusted to instructors by students and by the practice.

Criminal justice has received limited recognition in academics for the advancement of social science knowledge, theory, or methods with practice. The field struggles with legitimacy in the arena of higher education (Clear, 2001; Best, 2006; Finckenaue, 2005). An applied learning experience in the criminal justice field is not viewed as an academically sound experience equivalent to the caliber of residencies. This may be due to inaccurate perceptions by outsiders, but could also result as much from our own making in the discipline. We often fail to tightly couple education with the numerous workplace learning experiences our particular discipline has to offer.

Applied learning experiences in criminal justice programs are not typically represented by any one model. Common methods used to provide the out-of-classroom experience a hint of academia involve personal logs, journals, or summary papers (Stichman & Farkas, 2005; Bailey,

et al., 2004). Few of these classes attempt to prepare the student for their specific workplace learning experience. This may be due to the multitude of sites utilized by criminal justice academic departments, requiring unique preparation. The responsibility to prepare students to face what they will encounter in the field often falls by the way of “they will see it for themselves” (Stichman & Farkas, 2005, p. 148-149). In fact, the student’s and the department’s credibility with the agencies offering the applied learning experience hinges on how well the student is prepared to meet the needs of the agency.

### **FIELD’S EYE VIEW**

Current practitioners seem to have a love-hate relationship regarding their involvement in higher education applied learning experiences (Shaefer, 1996; Biddinger-Gregg & Schrink, 1997). Those in the field who have experienced a *tag along or shadow* know the difficulties in balancing opportunities for a safe learning experience with simply having the intern do menial tasks that do not pose a risk. Few, if any, cases have been found where an agency has been found liable for injury to an intern student, but there exists in the back of any coordinator’s mind the possibility that situations may arise resulting in civil ramifications (Stichman & Farkas, 2005; Biddinger-Gregg & Schrink, 1997).

The chance for potential employers to showcase what they have to offer the next generation of police officers, probation officers, and custody staff, to name a few, is often cited as a reason for allowing internships within an agency (Ross & Elechi, 2002). Agencies are also able to screen potential employees for a period of time at limited investment or risk responsibility, in the meantime providing a fresh audience to current employees (Bailey et al., 2004). Any experienced faculty member is easily able to recall a former student whose career jumping-off point was an internship experience, but details of how real and consistent these benefits are to the student or agency are limited. The vast majority of applied learning experiences that are allotted in the criminal justice field probably have more of a foundation in public relations and sense of duty, than recruitment of human resources.

### **JUVENILE CORRECTIONS CRITICAL ASSESSMENT TOUR (JCCAT)**

In the summer of 2008, an applied learning experience was conducted with the assistance of juvenile facility managers in four different states. The *Juvenile Corrections Critical Assessment Tour* (JCCAT) course was designed to allow students the chance for guided discussion regarding one specific area of the juvenile justice system (juvenile corrections),

to tour facilities, and shadow veteran staff members on the job in nine different juvenile facilities in four states. A multidisciplinary group of students interested in working with delinquent youth were recruited for this course. Quite different than the usual course offering, JCCAT ended up being dubbed the 'Shawshank Tour' by numerous administrators and supporters at the university.

The initial perception that JCCAT would simply provide students tours of facilities was not completely unexpected. In many ways the goal of the course was similar to the goal of the numerous tours offered during any academic year in criminal justice: to allow students the opportunity to view the inside of a facility. Unlike the simple tour, however, this course also allowed students to comparatively evaluate key differences in state care of adjudicated (sentenced) youth. Missouri Western State University provides a unique geographic location (northwest Missouri) for students to evaluate judicial, administrative, and program differences in the care of youth in four different states. Usually this is left for the new professional to learn only after accepting a job, which can lead to disenchantment with the field for the graduate, who may not realize a different paradigm is simply across a state line, a few miles away.

The second goal of the JCCAT course was to allow these state facilities the opportunity to "showcase" their program efforts for youth and attract quality employees who are interested in working with youth within their particular area of expertise. Unlike a simple tour, the JCCAT allowed facilities to do this within academic disciplines or by staff functions. After discussion with facility managers it was deemed best that a wide range of educational disciplines should be recruited, despite the course being offered through the Criminal Justice and Legal Studies Department. An institutional environment requires many services and is essentially its own self-contained community needing numerous types of professionals to operate successfully. Facility managers played an active role in the development and orchestration of JCCAT. The facility managers and state administrators approached in these four states were unanimously in favor of being a part of this course. Their involvement did not simply end at providing access; these youth care professionals assisted in the development of the class, adjusting facility scheduling, while some even provided funding and meals for the class. Most importantly, these facilities gave 3-5 hours of their day in each of the facilities visited.

Recruitment for the class occurred in the early spring of 2008. Due to class budget constraints and maintaining a focus on facility security, the class was limited to 12 students. After the initial interviews were conducted, two simply did not attend any further preparatory meetings and two dropped for personal reasons just prior (one week) to the course beginning. By design, no deposits or coercive means were used to

guarantee a set number of participants. Willingness was viewed as a necessity for this project to be effective. The eight remaining students were from four different disciplines and two were undecided, with the majority (4) being from the Criminal Justice and Legal Studies Department. All students were at least sophomore year status and one student attended a different college than the others.

The course was designed to model a workplace applied learning experience for students, incorporating a strong emphasis on reflective models of student learning. This would allow structured lecture content to fill the necessary background students should have prior to their first field experience in juvenile corrections, while still supporting contextual exploration of the experiences. Several of these students were from disciplines outside criminal justice, so it was imperative a general understanding of juvenile justice was provided. Techniques of programmatic review (audit) were provided students in the classroom as well. A full week of intensive classroom instruction was provided on lecture topics such as: history of youth care in the United States, current status of youth care, risk/needs assessments, ethics, treatment modalities, and on-the-job stress. In addition, interview skills, field-specific terminology, and documentation training were also added to increase the perceived credibility of these students to practitioners. Students were divided between the four states (two per state) and responsible for developing a state history of youth care and an organizational description of the state's youth services.

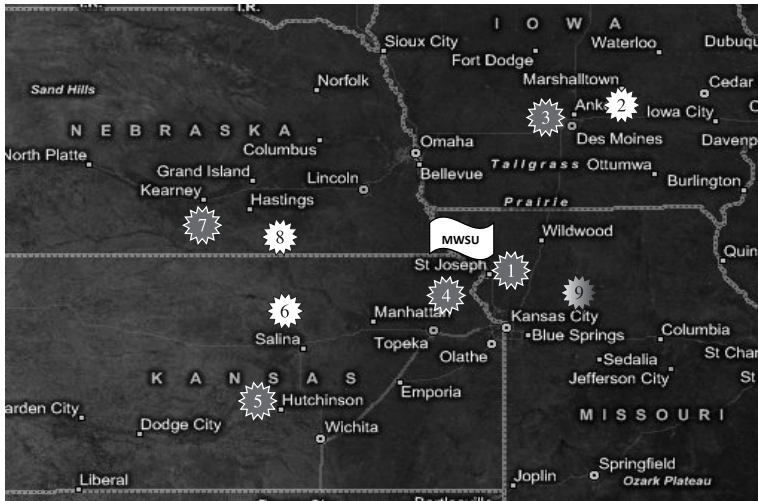
Prior to the class beginning, instructors predicted that the numerous tours would run together for students and faculty. Having conducted interviews of staff on site, instructors knew it was imperative for students to capture their initial thoughts and feelings regarding their mentor and the facility prior to moving on to the next site. Impromptu conversational transactions regarding facility occurrences would surely be forgotten or mistaken by the end of the course. To remedy this, two instruments were developed in the class during the first week of lecture and tour preparation. The first was referred to as "Describe Your Mentor." This instrument was to be filled out immediately after the student left the facility. Each JCCAT participant was asked to provide the general demographics and tenure information about the staff serving as their mentor. In addition, descriptive characteristics regarding their guide's personality, how they treated the student (as a peer, mentee, know-nothing), and what they did with their mentor during their time were documented. In developing this tool the class was guided away from a 'check sheet' format. They were encouraged to use their own descriptive abilities in their documentation of the experience. The class settled on a tool and made only minor adjustments after the first JCCAT experience.

A second instrument, "Describe Your Facility," was designed during class lecture preparation as well. One of the two student representatives of the state the facility was located in would interview their classmates immediately after a JCCAT site. Because travel took place after each tour, students were usually interviewed en route to the next destination—creating a 70 mph captive environment. Instructors driving the travel vans were cognizant of peer impact, so no third party interruptions were allowed until all interviews were completed. Student interviewers asked their fellow JCCAT students to identify what they observed regarding facility culture, to describe the youth they observed, as well as their opinion of facility security level (low, medium, high). One of the more telling questions in this instrument was simply "Would you work here?" A simple yes or no to this question was not accepted. Interviewers were encouraged to probe for reasoning behind the student's conclusion. Finally, the two state interviewers also interviewed each other and summarized their findings in their final project, which merged the state's organizational mission and history with the JCCAT experience.

In the second week of the summer class, students had their first JCCAT at a state juvenile male facility. As designed, students were oriented by a facility administrator prior to being given about 2.5 hours to spend with front-line staff members during the course of their duties. Students were paired with group leaders, youth care workers, therapeutic professionals and some administrators, depending on each student's interest area. Course instructors were allowed to observe interactions, but at least one instructor remained in a central location for contact if necessary. Debriefing took place after the facility visit with facility administrators and the following day in the classroom, as a class. The first mentor summaries and student interviews were conducted with the assistance of the co-instructors for the course, and minor adjustments were made to the instruments.

Administrators hosting the first JCCAT followed the desired course blueprint precisely. This allowed JCCAT students to have a better understanding of expectations prior to embarking on a six day, seven facility whirlwind tour of Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska juvenile correctional facilities, finishing their JCCAT in Missouri during the final week of the class (see Figure 1). The class visited five all-male, two all-female, and two co-ed correctional facilities during the JCCAT tour. Again, written summaries and group debriefings took place after each facility visit. Two of these facilities were mechanically secure with a fenced perimeter, but the majority of facilities resembled more of an open campus—often with only locked living quarters between the residents and off grounds. As stated by one JCCAT student: "Some of these looked like high school campuses, not correctional facilities."



**Figure 1: JCCAT Tour Map**

KEY: In order of JCCAT: 1. St. Joseph, MO (male); 2. Toledo, IA (co-ed); 3. Eldora, IA (male); 4. Atchison, KS (male); 5. Lamed, KS (male); 6. Beloit, KS (female); 7. Kearney, NE (male); 8. Geneva, NE (female); 9. Watkins Mill, MO (co-ed). MWSU-Missouri Western State University, St. Joseph, MO.

The JCCAT class logged over 1600 miles, visited nine facilities in four states, and experienced a truly unique and intensive learning experience in a four-week period. The efforts of the facility staff involved in these tours fell consistently above expectations of instructors and students. Open praise for the students and the JCCAT project was received from facility and staff both during and after the course. In general, all facilities followed the course blueprint with only minor alterations. Access to facility staff was limited at one facility, but program review, administrator Question and Answer (Q&A), as well as on-site lunch with youth allowed adequate facility review for the students. The majority of facilities even allowed JCCAT students access to youth during mealtime, in Q&A sessions, and several times in institutional hearings. According to student responses, it was these contacts with youth that trumped all other aspects of the tours.

### EVALUATING THE EXPERIENCE

How to evaluate and measure the academic preparation for this unusual learning experience was a concern in its design. After the tours were completed, during the last two days of class, activities and discussion summarized the overall experience. This included open discussion of state systems and individual facilities (and their occupants). Students

were allowed to use their interview sheets to assist in the recall of specific facility and staff. A final exam or post-test was provided at the end of the last day of class. Test responses were not factored into the course grade and students were again allowed to use documents to assist them in recall when needed. The final test consisted of scenario questions such as:

Your potential employer's interview committee sees Law 396 JCCAT on your list of experiences that are job-related. They ask you how completing a college class would make you a more qualified employee in the juvenile justice system. What would you say?

Over half of the students used the phrase "hands on" directly in their response to this question. One student wrote: "I got to participate in everyday happenings...I didn't just get time with staff...got time with youth: boys AND girls." Almost all used phrases such as: "behind the scenes," "behind the walls," or "what really happens" to describe their JCCAT experience, also focusing on what can be learned outside the class and "textbooks." But most impressive to the instructors of the course was discussion of the differences in programs that were identified in these states. Four students directly applied their response to career goals, such as: "I could see for myself if it was the course I want my career path to take," and "I am well aware of the time [and]...additional training that will be required of me."

Based on a review of the student responses, it is apparent the learning experience outside the classroom is what stood out most to these students. Not surprisingly, lecture or in-class presentations by instructors were not as memorable in the response to this question. The work with professionals in the field as well as time with youth was the focus of their responses.

A second scenario question changed the audience for the students, asking them to identify to a graduate school advisor what JCCAT was and was not:

Your Graduate School Advisor sees Law 396 JCCAT on your transcript and is unsure what it should count towards. Your advisor asks you to describe the class. What do you say?

JCCAT students framed their responses more to the practicum/internship experience, focusing on either differences in state systems, or state philosophies of rehabilitation and security. One student stated: "We discovered how MO, KS, NE & IA differed in their facilities and their course of how the juveniles were released"—focusing more on the systems aspect, while another focused on her direct experience with "staff in the psychology-related fields," which was her academic field of choice.

Students were also asked if they believed they were properly prepared for the tour component of the class. Overall, students indicated they felt properly prepared and all indicated it was a very helpful course for those interested in this field. Two students indicated they did not feel properly prepared, but in a follow-up interview with these students, one stated: "It was more of a shock and awe than what could have been done in lecture." The second student told instructors: "I don't think I was mentally prepared for the facilities....I don't think that I was unprepared educationally as to what to expect, but it was a pretty draining experience. Definitely worth the work, though." The lasting effect this workplace learning experience had on these students was encouraging to the instructors, to say the least.

A third student brought up an interesting point regarding the collegiality of the class and stated it would have helped the tour to discuss this more often. The instructor's role in building the necessary *esprit de corps* in a class depends greatly on the makeup of the class and class ownership of the task at hand. Faculty were consulted initially by students about other students who did not follow schedules or lacked input. By the end of the class there was a distinguishable divide, but students maintained a civil response that did not interfere with project goals. Students were asked to self-rate their collegiality in the JCCAT post-test. All self-rated themselves as fair to good, but no one identified poor or excellent. Interestingly, "classmate collegiality" was rated overall excellent by half the attendees and only fair by one.

Post-tour interview sheets were copied, collected and not allowed to be altered by students. The design of these tools was to capture the initial impact of the tour site. Several students voiced their concern about this during the process, due to their ability to "compare apples to apples" (student comment) as they saw more facilities. The final classroom discussion allowed students to review all of these facilities and the state systems in hindsight in preparation for the final exam given at the end of the last day. The question "where you would like most to be employed" was again asked in their final exam. Students were asked to rank state systems and facilities. The facilities were also divided by gender to evaluate preferences by students. Two state systems were ranked either 1 or 2 (highest) by all except one student. This single exception was a student focused more on a custodial approach than the majority of other students. Interestingly, when identifying which facility the students would choose to work in (male, female, all), these individual facilities did not always fall into the same state system the students chose as their top two. One such facility (female) appeared as a particular favorite for JCCAT participants despite the state it operated in not being ranked either 1 or 2 by any student. Comments offered compassion for that particular facility's plight: "Could use/needed my help" and "Did much more with less...compared to the boys facility."

The final exam also requested student input on “Who should determine how long a youth should be committed to a facility?” This question was designed to allow JCCAT students the opportunity to merge their understanding of a system’s larger structure with those required to carry out the tasks of the job. Two states in the JCCAT made use of an indeterminate sentencing scheme, where the facility staff was responsible to determine how long a youth was committed. The other two states made use of a more formal determinate sentencing scheme, with judicial and administrative input into sentence length. This topic was discussed in class lecture, but it was uncertain if students were able to see the difference in release discretion at the facility where a youth was committed until discussing the benefits/dangers with staff mentors and administrators from different states. Course instructors predicted that all students would support facility-based control of release, but for different reasons due to the student’s academic discipline. Instructors believed that the criminal justice students would support control of release due to the behavior management benefits it provides, while the psychology/sociology/social work discipline would support facility based release for the individualized approach to rehabilitative care.

Directly contrary to the predicted results, no criminal justice JCCAT students supported release coming from facility staff where the youth was committed. We expected that discretion would be considered very important to future professionals, but apparently a *justice approach* was considered more desirable by this criminal justice group of students. Only JCCAT students coming from the psychology/social work perspective were unanimously in favor of facility-based release, focusing more on an *individualized* approach to release readiness.

To assist future offerings of JCCAT or other such multi-site applied learning experiences, students were also asked to rank travel, hotels, personal time allotted, and facility preparedness. The services encountered in these mostly rural communities where facilities are located were found to be extremely hospitable and accommodating to the limited budget of the trip. All students ranked meals, hotels, and travel comfort “above average.” Only one student ranked “facility preparedness” as fair, but all other aspects of JCCAT organization and “comfort” were ranked “good” or “excellent.” Classroom climate in experiences such as JCCAT does involve much more than the typical collegiate lecture hall. The learning environment should not be too strenuous, and concern for “down time” for these students to digest this experience was considered very necessary. One student directly commented on her fear that “overnight stays sounds like you may never have free time, but as soon as you’re out of the facility [and] conversed [with other people], you got time to yourself.”

Students were asked in their initial interview (prior to the course) if they had any apprehensions about entering a secure facility. JCCAT

was, in fact, several students' first experience inside a secure facility. In the final exam, all students identified feelings of safety being "excellent" during the JCCAT experience. This is certainly a testament to the facility mentors and managers who were involved in this course, but one that should not be taken for granted or assumed when developing workplace-designated applied learning experiences. Specific attention should be given to how students view their learning environment to ensure there are no roadblocks, real or perceived, to this experience. Reflective, ongoing communication between instructors and learning groups can assist in achieving this goal.

### LECTURE CONTENT

To provide JCCAT students credibility with the facility staff, as well as the ability to evaluate key components of facility culture, it was imperative the class was properly prepared. In an analysis of the first week's lecture content, students were asked to identify lecture topics they actually heard being discussed in the facilities. Once again, students were allowed to consult their facility notes. The students identified each of the lecture topics discussed in class preparation as being addressed by staff or administration in the facilities visited (see Table 1). Interestingly, every student reported that *Job Stress* was discussed by staff at every facility they visited. Other topics reported as being discussed in the majority of facilities (median of 3 or higher: over half but not all facilities) were: *Outside Regulating Agencies, Risk and Needs Assessments, Juvenile System, Responsivity, Sentencing, Outcome Measures, Discretion, Difficulties of Reform, Treatment Modality, Rehabilitation, and Culture*.

Due to the relatively small class size, limited generalizations can be made. What is important to faculty preparing to teach workplace-centered courses is to be able to identify topics that are also significant to employers/employees where the students are going to be placed (in the case of JCCAT, juvenile correctional facility staff). This will ensure coursework is geared to current practice, allowing students to be in tune with what is of most concern in their desired occupation. For example, based on these interactions between student and facility staff, job stress is a very real issue to those working in the field. Students were able to discuss job stress that veteran and newer staff experience on a daily basis and how they get through these situations to show up another day. As discussed in lecture, students found that it is rarely the youth that are in the staff member's care that create the most stress on the job for staff. It is instead their peripheral responsibilities and roadblocks to what they view is necessary to help the youth.

**Table 1: Students' recall of lecture topics discussed in facility: N=7. Median is reported (right column).**

Regarding lecture content: Please circle the appropriate answer to the following lecture topics <u>you heard</u> being discussed or mentioned while in the facilities.	1 Not discussed in any facility	2 Some facilities but not over half	3 Over half but not all facilities	4 All facilities this was discussed	<u>Median</u>
Outside regulating agencies	0	1	4	2	3
Ethical dilemmas	1	3	3	0	2
Risk and needs assessment	0	0	2	5	4
Juvenile corrections history	0	4	2	1	2
Juvenile system as it relates to juvenile corrections	0	2	3	2	3
Females in juvenile corrections (difficulties, needs & response)	0	4	3	0	2
Responsivity	0	1	5	1	3
Sentencing (as it relates to facility goals & practices)	0	1	1	5	4
Outcome measures	0	3	2	2	3
Discretion	1	2	4	0	3
Disproportionate Minority Confinement	0	5	2	0	2
Difficulties of reform	1	2	3	1	3
Treatment modality	0	1	3	3	3
Rehabilitation	0	1	4	2	3
Juvenile crime rates and victimization	0	0	5	2	3
Job stress	0	0	0	7	4
Culture	0	2	4	1	3

Somewhat concerning in these findings was the limited discussion of disproportionate minority confinement by those in the facility. This issue remains central to introductory coursework in juvenile justice, but appears to be considered less pertinent by facility staff. A possible explanation considered during debriefing was it may be the staff member's willingness to work with whoever is committed that makes the difference, taking little responsibility for how the youth arrived in

their care. In addition, the fact that the racial makeup of these facilities has changed little over much of the tenure of the staff could lead to the application of “that is the way it is, has been, and will be” to justify these trends. JCCAT students quickly identified differences in staff racial makeup relative to the population of youth they served. Interestingly, this point seemed to lose its initial effect on students as more tour sites were visited—desensitization that is not so different than what is experienced in the field or discipline.

Based on student reflection during the final exam, the lecture preparation was overall on topic to the current concerns of those in the juvenile correctional field. All topics discussed in the classroom were identified in at least one facility by students. Notable to instructors was the students’ understanding of terms such as *Responsivity* or *Culture*, which would become evident during debriefing sessions. These are not always easy concepts for the student, but when the student could apply each idea to active interactions with staff and facility observations, they demonstrated the ability to translate the meaning of the academic term into the practical events and common facility language. Workplace learning may not always appear as a direct reflection or in the context of a specific example used in the classroom. The student’s ability to translate and utilize these concepts is indeed a proud moment for their instructors.

## DISCUSSION

Allowing students to view and process the difference in state missions and juvenile facilities was the focus of this applied learning experience. To teach how an organization’s mission is reflected in the performance of an individual facility is a point difficult to drive home to students via textbook and lecture hall. Even if the student is fortunate enough to have field experience, this is usually limited to one system. In addition, the ability to compare like experiences in the field with peers and faculty enhanced the learning process. This often occurred via agitation within the group of students. For example, due to the multidisciplinary makeup of the class, some viewed with disfavor the open campus of facilities while others challenged the razor wire surrounding other facility grounds. This provided some interesting exchanges within and outside the classroom, which would occasionally require refereeing. Students were encouraged to look past their initial opinions and impressions, but not to ignore them. To provide a true critical assessment of a facility’s mission, students were challenged to examine what are the goals of the organization first, before they determined whether the facility is meeting those goals. As seen firsthand by the class, a system that focuses on custody and professionalization will appear different than one that has a dynamic focus on peer involvement in treatment. A student may feel

more comfortable working in one type of system or the other, but this is not to say that the other is performing its mission poorly.

Few issues raised more vocal concern with the JCCAT class than the differences between male and female facilities. The female youth facilities were viewed by the class as insufficiently funded and in poor physical condition. In an interview by our university magazine, one JCCAT student stated: "I was upset and shocked. ...It was space age for boys and pioneer for the girls" (Holtz, 2009, p.6). The class debriefing of this issue provided an opportunity to examine a state's willingness to fund a philosophy of community protection versus individual youth need. The perceived social threat of the young male delinquent versus the need to protect the female delinquent was discussed, as it is in most Introduction to Juvenile Justice/Delinquency textbooks. Unlike traditional lectures, the class was able to use personal observations as reference to this dilemma. For several JCCAT students, these facility funding differences led to a change toward commitment to work with girls if given the opportunity, even despite the vast majority of staff in male, female, and coed facilities identifying delinquent girls as being more "difficult" and "challenging" to work with than male youth.

## **DEVELOPING LEARNING SPACE**

This paper would be incomplete without addressing the necessity of timely debriefing and creating the necessary learning spaces in work-place experiences such as the JCCAT (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Bailey et al., 2004). Issues such as facility staff demeanor, youth behavior, and somewhat challenging ethical decision making by staff were considered and reviewed within a short period of time between students, students and faculty, and also with practitioners. Students were instructed to remain focused on their task, but to discuss these incidents with course instructors who would then present the incident to facility administrators. Three such incidents did occur during JCCAT.

The benefit of immediate processing of student observations and concerns was evident in the confidence the class displayed in their interactions with facility staff and each other as the JCCAT progressed. Students even began requesting additional debriefing sessions to discuss their observations, indicating a personal commitment to the project. This was also evident in the final exam comments: "more time dedicated to interviews" and "group meetings (class, not institutional) were good but should be used more often." Courses that apply active field participation for the future professional should consider the position of these students. The student is left to disentangle ethically challenging experiences without assistance from faculty or peers. In addition, relying solely on the practitioner's perception of how daily activities merge into the overall



organizational mission will most likely limit the growth of the student's understanding of their future vocation (Sgroi & Ryniker, 2002). This can result in the student developing an overall negative perception of the agency and field, when in fact it may be simply an isolated experience (Jordan, Burns, Bedard, & Barringer, 2007).

### **JCCAT SUMMARY**

In hindsight, this class was an exhausting endeavor for instructors and students. These types of experiences abound with the possibility of pitfalls in planning, student (faculty) personality clashes, and facility incidents threatening the advancement of the project. In this case, these types of problems failed to rear their ugly heads, making the result fully worth the effort. It was refreshing to see the excited undergraduate student knowledgeably discussing issues with professionals in the field. Students intrigued by what they hear, view in the media, or read often have an almost uncontrollable desire to be a part of something they have only observed haphazardly. By coupling knowledge of the system with actual observation, these JCCAT students were able to develop an informed outlook of the impact the individual facility staff can have on achieving an organization's mission. This is especially important for students entering a field where subsystems exist within a system, but each maintains a diverse and sometimes competing group of activities. For example, the juvenile justice system has judges, police, and correctional workers all participating in a general mission, but having specific duties that tend to overlap and conflict (Leiber, Schwarze, Mack, & Farnworth, 2002). Teaching early that efforts of cooperation do matter as a way to reach the mission of an organization is a necessity for educators.

The JCCAT class should be commended for improving the relationship between academia and current practitioners in this specific field. One facility manager wrote: "This was a great day...many of the staff involved appreciated being able to 'show off' their talents and educate others. It was a win/win situation for everyone." The accolades given students by facility representatives were numerous and seemed to focus clearly on the level of understanding of the JCCAT class of system mechanics, or "how prepared they were for what we do" and "the feedback I received from my staff is that your students were great.. They seemed real interested and asked good questions. My people enjoyed your people, come back ANY time." The post-tour Q&A with administrators would often resemble a peer discussion more than a classroom or training session. By the end of the JCCAT tours, facility staff and the students were openly comparing program and systems from different sites where these practitioners had also traveled. These experiences serve as confirmation to the value employers place on those with college degrees, easing the transition from student to practitioner.

Although the co-instructors were happy with the student turnout and efforts for this course's inaugural run, future JCCAT type courses could be greatly enhanced by expanded recruitment and developing methods to ease the burden for students to participate. These methods could include student travel funding, scholarship opportunities, or simply making space available in curriculum requirements to allow students the chance to personalize their own education. In this class, having male students involved may have provided a significantly different perspective to the information gleaned from those on the tour. Facility administrators also commented openly on the need for younger male role models for the youth in their care, a pool higher education can provide these facilities which are often found in remote, rural areas.

Applied learning experiences in the workplace provide faculty a unique way for students to remain bonded to their field of interest. A thorough understanding of organizational needs will greatly increase the course planner's ability to develop these types of applied learning experiences (Jeffords, 2007). Early in the course planning, facility administrators discussed the reality of one academic discipline not being sufficient to produce an effective environment to change troubled youth. In retrospect, the tension produced in mixing academic disciplines further enhanced the learning experience and, in the end, served to better prepare these future professionals for this challenging vocation and the wide range of individuals they will be working with. Academics must be willing to cross the often well guarded academic boundaries to develop the types of workplace opportunities that will benefit both the student and the field.

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