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## Exploring the Educational Impact of Academic Field Trips Over Time

### Cover Page Footnote

We would like to thank the staff at Eastern State Penitentiary for accommodating our large group for over a decade. Their informative tours have taught our students about the rich history of Eastern State as well as the American prison system and encouraged them to consider alternatives to mass incarceration.

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# Exploring the Educational Impact of Academic Field Trips over Time

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## **I**ntroduction

Prior research states that experiential learning can be in the form of internships, field trips, service-learning, and research projects (George et al., 2015). Field trips, specifically, can serve as a “conceptual bridge” to core curriculum and concepts (Grant et al., 1981). The practical nature of the discipline of criminal justice, thus, is a logical fit for experience-based learning related to cops, courts, and corrections (George et al., 2015). Through field trips and site visits, students are exposed to contexts outside of the pedagogical tools used in the traditional classroom. The tangible experiences gained from a field trip address the gaps in textbook learning and serve as an excellent forum to introduce real life settings (George et al., 2015; Scarce, 1997; Wright, 2000). Moreover, students are welcomed into a world where facilities they read about in books and viewed in documentaries are brought to life. Ultimately, students are then encouraged to engage with the world around them and seize the rare opportunity to enter criminal justice facilities freely and voluntarily.

The current study seeks to determine the educational impact of prison field trips over time. Moreover, this study is noteworthy because it uses a defunct prison, Eastern State Penitentiary, as the milieu and provides a model to assess immediate and long-term student knowledge retention. Eastern State Penitentiary is iconic as it was once the most famous and expensive prison in the world. The prison, operated from 1829 to 1970 and is known for creating public dialogue around issues of crime, race and social justice, and the evolving nature of the criminal justice system (“History of Eastern State,” 2021a). This study is the culmination of the scholarly methods used to assess experiential learning outcomes using a carceral tour, and proposes a nuanced approach to exploring long term retention of correctional and penological knowledge.

Against this backdrop, the goal of this study is to contribute to existing scholarly literature on experiential learning specifically to examine the educational impact of criminal justice field trips over time. To this end, the first section discusses prior research about the strengths and weaknesses of experiential learning to identify the diversity of opinions, variety of assessment methods, and the gaps in the literature. Next, the data and questionnaire are described, which include responses from 26 undergraduate students who participated in pre-tour, post-tour, and follow-up surveys on the history of Eastern State Penitentiary and prison trends in the United States. Paired t-tests are used to compare student scores before and after the prison tour as well as during the subsequent semester. Finally, in the conclusion, the implications of the findings are discussed along with opportunities for future pedagogical innovation within the field of criminal justice.

## Literature Review

The process of learning through experience is a complex cycle articulated by Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) which includes “action/reflection” and “experience/abstraction” (Kolb & Kolb, 2017, p. 11). Field trips are a widely used experiential learning tool intended to enrich curriculum and promote academic learning and professional goals across disciplines and grade levels (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014; Farmer et al., 2007; Kisiel, 2006; Scarce, 1997; Wright, 2000). Criminal justice programs have a long-standing tradition of taking field trips to criminal justice agencies within the realms of law enforcement, courts, and corrections. Field trips to prisons provide especially fertile ground for enriching academic experiences that have been used to assess a broad spectrum of topics from participants’ empathy for prisoners (Long & Utley, 2018) to their interest in careers in corrections (Payne et al., 2003; Wilson et al., 2011).

The degree to which experiential learning field trips have an appreciable impact on education has been explored and debated by scholars (Calaway et al., 2016; Farmer et al., 2007; Grant et al., 1981; Grobman, 1981; Kiseil, 2006; LaRose, 2011; Long & Utley, 2018). Moreover, there is a broad spectrum of measures implemented by academics to gauge satisfaction, favorability, and impact of experiential learning opportunities. According to Long and Utley (2018), the empirical literature about college level field trips to prisons has been predicated on three distinct methods: qualitative anecdotal feedback, quantitative formal assessments, and mixed methods approaches, most often in the form of multi-stage reflection projects. Additionally, a handful of the aforementioned studies identify key objectives and ascertain how pre- and post-field trip tests or activities shed light on the benefits and limitations of experiential learning field trips.

An extensive review of literature shows some scholars question the value of field trips, cautioning the risk of “drive by education” (LaRose, 2011, p. 1) and a “stand alone experience” (Kisiel, 2006, p. 7). Based on these criticisms and the collective desire to showcase longer term gains, educators identified goals and assessment strategies. Moreover, it is strongly recommended that the field trip experience alone is not enough for student learning and requires supplemental, reinforcement techniques to meet academic learning goals (George et al., 2015). In their study of the knowledge retention of multicultural content, Farmer et al. (2007) conducted primary interviews with students a year after visiting the George Washington Carver Monument. Their findings support the use of and preference for qualitative methods to assess recall. Scholars unequivocally support the use of post-trip follow up to gauge learning. Assessments and activities range from immediate reflection assignments (Grefe, 2018) and surveys (Long & Utley, 2018) following the field trip to longer term strategies such as interviews (Farmer et al., 2007) and writing exercises to embed themes into program curriculum (George et al., 2015; Grefe, 2008). To identify if experiential learning opportunities like internships and field trips were beneficial, George et al. (2015) used senior and alumni surveys to query students. Their study concluded that the experiential learning opportunities availed to students were considered academically valuable and professionally beneficial for students and graduates.

A robust amount of literature examines the educational impact of prison tours; however, there are some scholars who raise awareness of the ethical concerns surrounding this practice (George et al., 2015; Long & Utley, 2018; Meisel, 2018; Smith, 2013;

Wilson et al., 2011). For example, in active prisons, there is a fear that inmates will be objectified by prison administrators and tour participants (Meisel, 2008). There is also a concern that the experience may be disingenuous because administrators have the ability to stage and script what students see and hear in fully operational or defunct prisons (Piche & Walby, 2010). Brown (2009) expresses concern that inmates are seen but not heard in most prison tours and penal spectators become divorced from the incarceration experience. Furthermore, prisons may be regarded as veritable human zoos that display inmates and subject them to judgmental stares from outsiders (Meisel, 2008). Carceral tours are also criticized for their risk of promoting passivity (Cromwell & Birzer, 2012) and entertainment (Grobman, 1992) in place of academic learning. With the overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in prison, this dynamic may very well reinforce stereotypes about race and crime if students are not engaged in reflective dialogue after the tour. In stark contrast, Smith (2013) maintains prison tours offer an active, multi-sensory experience that may leave students emotionally and physically drained but will likely promote “the internalization of knowledge” (p. 55). For example, touring a predominantly minority occupied prison may be one of the only times Caucasians experience “being the racial minority” (p. 56). Wacquant (2001) encourages students to be cognizant of their outsider status and take in the invaluable visual and tactile experiences that promote knowledge. While their research does not reference race in particular, Boag and Wilson (2013) found that empathy increased and previously held negative stereotypes decreased when students interacted with prisoners. Furthermore, students were surprised to find inmates who were well-behaved and capable of holding civilized conversations.

There is a wealth of literature about using criminal justice experiences for pedagogy (Calaway et al., 2016; George et al., 2015; Grant et al., 1981; Grefe, 2008; Long & Utley, 2018; Payne et al., 2003; Robinson, 2000; Scarce, 1997; Stacer et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2011). Moreover, only a handful of studies (i.e., Long & Utley, 2018; Stacer et al., 2017) implemented rigorous empirical methods to assess outcomes of prison tours. These studies criticized previous literature for relying on anecdotal feedback from students and professors who rated the experience as favorable. For example, Stacer et al. (2017) queried students enrolled in three different criminal justice courses before and after participation in a prison tour. The primary focus of the study examined if criminal justice students’ perceptions of inmates, officers, and the correctional

system changed after the tour and how the experience shaped their desire to work in corrections. Stacer et al. (2017) found that the majority of participants believed their knowledge from their respective criminal justice courses was enriched by the prison tour. Similarly, Long and Utley's (2018) study involved pre- and post-test measures to gauge the impact of a prison tour on students' prisoner empathy, inmate perception, and knowledge about the correctional system and prison reform. They conclude that while their study did not find appreciable attitudinal differences in prison reform and empathy, prison tours may improve basic knowledge of prisons and the "realities of prison life" (Long & Utley, 2018, p. 45).

It is important to note that this prior research differs from the current study in three ways. First, previous experiential learning studies were based on activities that were typically oriented around a course and often directed at majors. However, there are noteworthy examples of experiential learning programs and activities operating beyond the parameters of major cohorts or coursework requirements that are relevant to the objectives and methods of the current study. For example, while their study explores new directions in business programs, Grau and Akins (2011) suggest that non majors can benefit from a "comparable learning experience to that of majors" and identify a creative experiential learning method to promote student engagement. In addition, Seed (2008) discussed how one experiential learning program for pre-service teachers is "an effective way to build a graduate student cohort" (p. 209). Wilson et al. (2016) argue that study abroad programs offer an "ideal context" for experiential learning and propose best practices in "critical reflection" for studying abroad to meet experiential learning standards. Second, previous research administered the post-tests after the tour and no additional assessments were conducted over time to gauge knowledge retention. While it is reassuring to know that most participants have the ability to recall and reflect on facts and details, field trips are far more pedagogically desirable if there is longer term information retention. Third, the variables in the prior studies did not include specific facts about the site and punishment knowledge in general. Based on prior research, it is evident that the scholarly literature focusing on pre- and post-test assessments of history of punishment and punishment philosophy is scant.

Prior research can be used as a veritable how to guide for educators' intent on using prison field trips as experiential learning. For example, Grefe (2008) suggests a multi-step pedagogical model to teach

prison history and present-day incarceration using a documentary about New Gate Prison or attending a field trip to the site. Examples of context based critical thinking and reflection assignments are suggested to focus on crimes committed in the late 1770s and the popular culture and social activities that were commonplace for free society. While Grefe's (2008) work is not focused on knowledge retention, it extolls the benefits of using the tour as a means to teach about correctional practices to fulfill academic goals.

Prior research also offers best practices to promote academic goals and enhance learning through prison field trips. For example, Payne et al. (2003) acknowledge that students have different learning styles and the purposeful and appropriate use of field trips can optimize learning. They suggest that educators have to set expectations for students by explaining course objectives, post trip assignments (i.e., field journal entries, surveys, or reaction papers) and what they expect that students will "get out of the field trip" (p. 331). While McLoughlin (2004) also suggests a scaffolded approach for "trip facilitated learning and growth", she encourages students to offer suggestions for field trips to build "ownership" of the event (p. 161). "Building readiness" is accomplished by tying the trip into course curriculum and emphasizing learning objectives (p. 161). "Cognitive processing" can be accomplished on the bus ride home and may include games and activities based on the information gathered from the trip (p. 162). Finally, the next class meeting is devoted to "metacognitive processing" of students' learning as they link and integrate the knowledge gained from the field trip experience to future coursework and learning goals (p. 162).

When field trips are used as a pedagogical tool to achieve academic learning outcomes, methodical assessments are suggested to encourage genuine learning, discourse, and critical thinking. While many of the above studies use creative exercises, critical reflection papers, or writing prompts to accomplish academic learning objectives, the current study provides a framework for content specific pre- and post-tests to determine if correctional and penological knowledge is gained and retained after field trips. The current study also extends knowledge retention over two semesters when previous research on prison tours does not mention the specific time frame for post tour assessments (George et al., 2015; Long & Utley 2018). In addition, this study differs from previous research because the prison tour was neither mandatory, nor was it a course requirement. Rather, participants elected to attend the prison tour on which this study was based.



As George et al. (2015) suggest, active, meaningful engagement is especially important for criminal justice students. Moreover, students who are fortunate to learn outside the classroom at criminal justice sites and speak with criminal justice professionals may get a better sense of the daily operations of the facility, insights from key players, such as practitioners or inmates, and more confidently identify their career goals. These active experiences inspired the current study to explore the educational impact of a prison field trip over time.

It is evident that the definition of and the assessment strategies for field trips are somewhat fluid which facilitate autonomy for instructors and pliability for assessments. Moreover, it may not be practical for some instructors to incorporate course based experiential learning due to scheduling challenges and student availability. The current study combines established experiential learning strategies with effective reflection techniques to encourage student engagement and yield astute observations. The reflective exercises were at first facilitated by tour guides and then revisited on the bus and during the lunch break similar to McLoughlin's (2004) attempts at "cognitive processing." Furthermore, the combination of formal tour guide prompts and informal instructor-moderated conversation promotes students' profound reflection of salient topics.

The methods and goals of the current study are predicated on the college's academic learning objectives for its mandatory liberal arts curriculum and the criminal justice program's student learning outcomes. While the students participating in the study were neither enrolled in a course, nor a homogenous group of criminal justice majors, they are indeed required to successfully complete specific courses within the general education curriculum that support the sophisticated reflection of problems plaguing society and thoughtful consideration of mitigation strategies. Moreover, the design of the Eastern State tour, its exhibits, and scripted and casual queries demand pragmatic approaches to address mass incarceration trends. In this light, the researchers maintain the Eastern State Penitentiary field trip provides fertile ground for experiential learning and an opportunity to gauge knowledge retention over time.

## Current Study

The current study examines if students acquire and retain knowledge from an academic field trip to a historical prison. Specifically, two research questions are addressed:

1. Do students *gain* knowledge about the history of the penitentiary system and current prison trends immediately after completing a prison tour?
2. Do students *retain* knowledge about the history of the penitentiary system and current prison trends during the following semester after a prison tour?

Undergraduate students at a small, private, Northeastern college signed up for the college's annual criminal justice field trip to Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A convenience sample of 26 undergraduate students was used for the analyses and completed both the pre- and post-tour in-person questionnaires. During the following semester, an online follow-up survey was administered via email request and 17 students responded which accounted for a 65% response rate.

## Procedure

The annual field trip to Eastern State Penitentiary was advertised to the entire college community in early Fall via email announcements and digital signage displays across campus. Students from all majors and academic programs could elect to join the group on an in-depth, one hour guided tour of the prison. These tours explore the history of the penitentiary system in the United States and promote discussions about current criminal justice and punishment reform. The purpose of these tours is clearly tied to the academic and learning objectives of the criminal justice program and general education curriculum. Throughout the tour, formal and informal reflective opportunities are led by guides and instructors to encourage students to consider diverse perspectives, beliefs, and values within the criminal justice system in relation to their own cultural frameworks. Additionally, students develop an understanding of the history of the correctional system as well as racial and social injustice within the system, which allows them to consider the perspectives of other cultures and societies, while understanding the commonality of interests among different peoples in the human community.

Prior to the tour, students were asked to participate in a pre-tour survey on the bus ride from the college campus to the prison. Students were informed that the survey was completely voluntary and for research purposes only. Students were asked to not look at their phones or discuss the questions with other students while taking the survey. The pre-tour survey included 17 questions about the

history of Eastern State Penitentiary, demographics of inmates, incarceration trends, health concerns, famous individuals incarcerated at the prison and other corrections related information. Demographic questions were also included on the pre-tour survey. After attending the tour, students were again asked to participate in a post-tour survey. The same 17 questions about Eastern State Penitentiary were included as well as a few student satisfaction questions. To determine the educational impact of the tour over time, students were sent a follow-up, online survey via email request the following semester. The same 17 questions were included as well as a final open-ended question asking what they remembered most about the tour. The main purpose of the study was to compare pre- and post-tour surveys; therefore, students were asked to provide their student identification number. Students were assured that all information would be confidential. Furthermore, this study was approved by the college's Institutional Review Board.

### *Variables*

As stated previously, the surveys included 17 questions about the history of Eastern State Penitentiary, demographics of inmates, incarceration trends, health concerns, famous individuals incarcerated at the prison and other corrections related information. The surveys included a variety of multiple choice (MC), true/false (TF) as well as fill-in-the-blank questions (FITB). A sample of questions are listed below:

MC: What year did Eastern State Penitentiary open?

MC: Eastern State Penitentiary had a revolutionary design that inspired over 300 other prison facilities around the world. What was the name of this innovative design?

MC: What was the greatest health concern for inmates at Eastern State Penitentiary?

TF: Eastern State Penitentiary incarcerated both children and women.

TF: The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world.

FITB: One of Eastern State Penitentiary's most famous prisoners was a notorious gangster who served eight months on a weapons charge in 1929 and was given a luxurious cell. His name is:

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Total correct answers were summed and each participant was assigned a pre-, post- and follow-up survey score.

Students were also asked about their satisfaction with the tour and their overall experience. The post-tour survey included both Likert items and open-ended questions about the tour. For example, students were asked to rate the tour from one to five, with one being not informative to five being informative. Students were also asked to report what they found most interesting about the prison. On the follow-up survey during the subsequent semester, students were asked to report what they remembered most about the tour. Finally, student demographic questions were included on the pre-tour survey, which included age, sex, race/ethnicity, year in school, GPA, number of prior criminal justice courses, if they previously took or were currently enrolled in a corrections-focused course, and if they had previously attended the trip.

### *Analysis*

Descriptive analyses were conducted on trip satisfaction as well as demographic variables. To analyze pre- and post-tour data, a paired t-test was used to compare student scores before and after the prison tour. Furthermore, pre-tour and follow-up surveys were compared as well as post-tour and follow-up surveys were compared to explore if the knowledge gained from the experience persisted over time. This allowed for the examination of significant differences between mean scores before and after the tour as well as into the following semester.

## **Results**

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Among the sample of undergraduate students, a larger number of females (84.6%) attended the trip compared to males (15.4%). The average age of students was 19.81 and upper level students (92.4%) were more likely to attend the trip compared to first year students (7.7%). Approximately 39% of students identified themselves as Hispanic/Latin/Spanish origin, 34.6% as White/Caucasian, 7.7% as Black/African American and 19.2% as two or more races or ethnicities.

The average GPA of students was 2.82 with a range from 1.34 to 4.00. About half of the students were majoring in the social sciences (i.e., criminal justice, psychology, social sciences with various emphases) and the other half were majoring in other academic fields (i.e., biology, education, nursing). Moreover, 23.1% of students declared

Table 1. Demographics Statistics

	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	4	15.4
Female	22	84.6
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White	9	34.6
Hispanic	10	38.5
Black	2	7.7
Two or More	5	19.2
<b>Age</b>		
18	4	15.4
19	11	42.3
20	3	11.5
21	3	11.5
22	4	15.4
23	1	3.8
<b>Number of CJ Courses</b>		
Zero	7	26.9
One	8	30.8
Two	4	15.4
More than three	7	26.9
<b>Year in School</b>		
First-year	2	7.7
Sophomore	10	38.5
Junior	8	30.8
Senior	6	23.1
<b>Major</b>		
Criminal Justice	6	23.1
Psychology	1	3.8
Social Sciences – Sociology	4	14.5
Social Sciences – Psychology	2	7.7
Other	13	50.0
<b>Previously Taken Corrections</b>		
Yes	4	15.4
No	22	84.6
<b>Previously Attended ESP Trip</b>		
Yes	12	46.2
No	14	53.8
	<b>RANGE</b>	<b>MEAN</b>
<b>Age</b>	18-23	19.81
<b>GPA</b>	1.34-4.00	2.82

Note: Other majors included Biology, Business, Computer Information Systems, Education, English, Health Sciences, History, and Nursing

criminal justice as their major. Slightly more than a quarter of all students, 26.9%, have never taken a criminal justice course and a majority, 84.6%, did not previously take a course on corrections. Lastly, a little more than half, 53.8%, of students did not previously attend the college's annual trip to Eastern State Penitentiary. Descriptive statistics for the variables described above are provided in Table 1.

### Comparison of Mean Scores

Each of the surveys included 17 questions related to the history of the penitentiary system and current prison trends. Table 2 displays the mean scores of prison knowledge before and after the prison tour as well as the follow-up survey during the subsequent semester. The mean pre-tour score for prison knowledge was 8.35, while the mean post-tour score was 12.92, and the mean follow-up score was 11.76. Table 2 also shows the t-score, the p-values, and Cohen's D effect size of the paired-samples t-tests. The findings show a statistically significant gain between the pre- and post-tour scores ( $t=9.93$ ;  $n=26$ ;  $p\leq.001$ ), which demonstrates an increase in prison knowledge after completing the tour at Eastern State Penitentiary. Additionally, the results also showed a statistically significant gain between the pre-tour scores and the follow-up scores ( $t=7.26$ ;  $n=17$ ;  $p\leq.001$ ). Thus, students continued to have a greater knowledge about the prison during the semester following the tour compared to before participating in the tour. Cohen's D calculation computes an effect size of 1.84 and 1.69, respectively, which is considered a large effect size and demonstrates a strong relationship between the scores.

When examining the post-tour scores and the follow-up scores, the results showed a statistically significant loss between the post-tour scores and follow-up scores ( $t=-2.40$ ;  $n=17$ ;  $p\leq.05$ ). Consequently, during the following semester students lost some of the knowledge gained after completing the prison tour. Cohen's D calculation computes an effect size of 0.66, which is considered a medium effect size.

### Student Satisfaction

On the post-tour survey as well as the follow-up survey during the following semester, several student satisfaction questions were included to gauge students' opinion about their experience during the tour. The post-tour survey produced both quantitative and qualitative findings. First, the students were asked to rate the tour from one (not informative) to five (informative). The findings indicate that 84.6% of students designated the highest value (5) on the scale and the mean score was 4.81. Students

Table 2. Paired T-Test Analyses between Pre-Tour, Post-Tour, and Follow-up Survey

	MEAN	T-SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE	COHEN'S D
Pre-Tour Survey	8.35			
Post-Tour Survey	12.92			
Follow-up Survey	11.76			
Pre- & Post- Tour Survey		9.93	p≤.001	1.84
Pre-Tour & Follow-up Survey		7.26	p≤.001	1.69
Post-Tour & Follow-up Survey		-2.40	p≤.05	0.66

were also asked to respond to the statement: *I would recommend this trip to others* and 96.2% of students reported strongly agree with a mean response of 4.96. Additionally, students were asked if they were on campus next fall, would they go on the trip again. Out of 26 students, 88.2% reported yes and the remaining 11.8% reported no as a result of no longer attending the college (i.e., graduating, transferring).

Also on the post-tour survey, students were asked two open-ended questions. The first question asked: *What did you find most interesting?* Of the 25 students who responded, the top three answers focused on the design of the prison or cell layout (28%), women and children incarcerated at the facility (20%), and 16% of students provided an overall likeness of the tour (for example, “All of it”). Some of these comments included: discussions about the type of inmates housed at Eastern State Penitentiary (i.e., *Al Capone’s cell; that women and children were also incarcerated*), the history of the penitentiary system (i.e., *the historical value of the prison*), prison and cell design (i.e., *the overall design and deterioration of the premises; the tiny rooms and lack of socialization between inmates; being able to go into the cells to see how they lived*), prison escapes (i.e., *how they were able to escape without the guards being aware*), and punishment and treatment practices (i.e., *the hoods the prisoners had to wear when going outside*).

Finally, the last question on the post-tour survey asked students if they had any additional comments. Approximately 27% of students responded and all comments were positive (i.e., *This was great; 10/10; Amazing Trip; Very Informative; Best Trip*) and provided encouragement for the continuation of the trip in the future (i.e., *I hope this continues every year*).

On the follow-up survey, distributed the semester following the tour, one open-ended question was included on the questionnaire. Students were asked: *What do you remember the most about the prison tour?* Approximately 65% of respondents noted the prison

cells, architecture, or design of the prison (i.e., *how small the cells were; the historical architecture; the way the cell halls were designed; the panopticon design; the way the hallways were structured and how in the middle guards were able to have a 360 view of everyone; what I remember most about the prison is the design of it rather interesting, as in the fact that most of the cells are still recognizable and in relatively good condition considering the age of the facility*). Approximately 18% of students commented on the restored places of worship such as the synagogue and chapel. Furthermore, about 12% commented on the “The Big Graph,” which illustrates incarceration rates in the United States, internationally (by rate and capital punishment policies), as well as displays a racial analysis of the prison population in the United States from the 1970s to present day (“The Big Graph,” 2022).

## Discussion

Although a substantial body of research has explored the various types of experiential learning opportunities for students as well as debated the strengths and weaknesses of short and long term knowledge retention, few accounts have examined the educational impact of criminal justice field trips over time. This study aimed to examine if students acquire and retain content specific, correctional and penological knowledge from an academic field trip to a historical prison. Specifically, two questions were examined: 1) Do students gain knowledge about the history of the penitentiary system and current prison trends immediately after completing a prison tour?; and 2) Do students retain knowledge about the history of the penitentiary system and current prison trends during the following semester after a prison tour? The findings are summarized and discussed below.

First, students gained knowledge about the history of the penitentiary system and the nature of prisons after participating in the field trip. The results showed there was an increase in correctional and penological knowledge by answering more questions correctly, on



average, after completing the tour at Eastern State Penitentiary. Second, students demonstrated a greater knowledge about the penitentiary system during the semester following the tour compared to before participating in the tour. This finding addresses the gap in prior quantitative research that mainly conducted post-tests shortly following the prison field trip. Notably, this finding is more closely related to the results of qualitative studies conducted by Farmer et al. (2007) one year after a cultural field trip. While their study is predicated on multicultural knowledge retention, they found that recollections were linked to involvement and all students retained content information (Farmer et al., 2007). Despite methodological differences, the results of the current study suggest promising results from a quantitative approach.

However, as evidenced by their responses, students lost some of the knowledge gained about the history of the penitentiary system and the nature of prisons during the following semester. Even though students demonstrated an overall increase in knowledge about the prison system, it is important to note that students scored lower on the examination the following semester than their score immediately after the trip was completed. This finding suggests the need for supplemental resources about prisons and correctional policy to concretize correctional and penal concepts.

Prior research about prison field trips has been shown to assess participants' attitudes about salient correctional topics, connections with course material, and overall satisfaction with the experience. Surprisingly, the scholarly literature about long term knowledge retention from prison field trips is deficient. Moreover, there is a lack of guidance to help retain knowledge over longer periods of time after engaging in experiential learning. For example, George et al. (2015) state that to enhance the impact of experiential learning on student knowledge, students are often asked to participate in various assignments (i.e., reflective journaling, group discussions) to connect concepts covered in class. However, details of these assignments are not provided and few articles provide scripts for post trip activities (Gref, 2008; McLoughlin, 2004).

The annual trip to Eastern State Penitentiary has existed for over ten years; however, anecdotally, the researchers observed that students were more engaged and actively involved in the experience during this specific trip. This may be due in part to them participating in the pre-test before their visit as compared to previous years. Supplying students with the pre-test may have inspired more active engagement in the prison history and tour. Drawing their attention to

specific features of the prison and interesting aspects of its history seems to have intrigued them. For example, the trip organizers observed that students were more inquisitive during the tour than in previous years. George et al. (2015) explain that "preparation for the field trip" introduces students to learning expectations to encourage critical thinking about their forthcoming trip (p. 479). Additionally, Payne et al. (2003) suggest articulating expectations and explaining assignments to students encourages them to "bring their field trip experiences back into the classroom" (p 331). This method may seed students with tools they need to hone into the educational value of field trips and thus, minimize the concerns for the entertainment effect.

While carceral tours explore a variety of historical and contemporary criminal justice issues, perhaps the most provocative are the disproportionate representation of racial minorities and discriminatory arrest, adjudication, and correction practices. These recurrent, important, and inevitable themes are woven into the Eastern State Penitentiary tour guide script and subsequent discourse. More specifically, two exhibits at Eastern State Penitentiary allow for further analysis of topics related to social and racial injustice. "The Big Graph" noted above by participants in the field trip, as well as "Prisons Today: Questions in the Age of Mass Incarceration" examine how policy changes since the 1960s have led to mass incarceration which has disproportionately impacted impoverished and disenfranchised communities, specifically communities of color ("Prisons Today," 2021b). The prison tour concludes with a deliberate visit to "The Big Graph" which is a 16 foot high, 3500-pound plate steel sculpture which offers three vantage points depending on where the visitor is positioned. The south view shows the appreciable and unprecedented growth in U.S. incarceration rates since 1900. The north view illustrates the racial breakdown of the American prison population in 1970 and today. The east view offers a global picture of every nation in the world, both by rate of incarceration and by policies around capital punishment ("The Big Graph," 2022). Irrespective of one's literal and figurative view, the structure is intended to provoke a cogent reflection on the history of incarceration and an often unsettling prediction for prison population trends. Students are invited to move about the installation, process the information, and seriously examine the story it tells. Additionally, tour guides and instructors use subtle prompts to engage students in a process that requires some distancing from preconceptions, prejudices, and pre-formed opinions about the criminal justice system and corrective and punitive practices. The

purpose is for students to reflect on the current state of corrections by becoming more familiar with criminal justice, economic, political, and social trends that have shaped it. Students are encouraged to take a position on the relevant issues which is informed and well thought-out as well as cognizant and respectful of justice goals and socioeconomic inequities.

As previously stated, some researchers have identified the risks and benefits of prison tours and in particular, using them as a platform to reduce stereotypes about prisons, promote empathy and better understand race and social injustice. To this end, prison tours may be a necessary and inextricable component to learn about the field of corrections and punishment practices.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

Several limitations of this study should be noted. The data was collected from a small, convenience sample of undergraduate students from a private college and may not be generalizable to students at larger, public college or university. Additionally, the sample retained was not large enough to support further analytic analyses to control for potential confounding variables (i.e., GPA, previously attended trip). Therefore, future research should try to collect a larger sample to explore predictors of prison knowledge.

Further examination of the participants also indicates that an overwhelming majority identified as female. The large proportion of females is not unusual for the college as 69% of undergraduate students at the college and over 50% of criminal justice majors are female. Female students also constitute the majority of individuals enrolled in college in the U.S. (DiPrete & Buchman, 2013). Previous research on adolescents demonstrates that females engage in more extracurricular activities compared to males (Durbin, 2021; Meier et al., 2018) and among college students females often seek for additional ways to become involved in informal settings beyond the classroom (Siler, 2020). Moreover, several of the studies included in the literature review include samples where females represent over 50% of the participants (George et al., 2015; Long & Utley, 2018; Stacer et al., 2017). While the overrepresentation of females in the sample may not be unusual compared to current educational trends and prior research, future studies may want to consider samples which include a more gender balanced population.

Additionally, the students were split into two groups when participating in the prison tour. Even

though the tour guides are instructed to provide the same information in every tour, there is a chance one group may have focused on a specific issue in more depth than the other group. For example, one group on their tour visited the synagogue and the other group did not. There was not a question specifically about this aspect of the prison, but it could have influenced the students' experience during the tour and possibly the knowledge they gained from the various tour guides.

Also, the students were instructed to complete the survey on their own without looking at their phones or speaking to another student. However, the initial pre- and post-test were both completed on the bus to and from the prison. It is very likely that because of the close proximity on the bus, students may have helped each other with their answers even though they were instructed not to talk or share answers while completing the survey. If future research uses a similar design to the current study, researchers may want to explore a setting that would prohibit or lessen the opportunity for communication during the assessment.

The current study also only examined if the students retained this information in the following semester. To further explore if students retain information over time, it would be advantageous to continue to assess students at multiple intervals (i.e., one year or two years later). However, as time progressed it would be difficult to differentiate if knowledge gained and retained was from the actual prison tour or information received in content-specific classes. For example, approximately 75% of the students in the current study had completed at least one criminal justice based course. Future research would either have to include a large enough sample to compare students who have not completed any criminal justice courses to those who have or control for the number of completed criminal justice courses over time. Additionally, slightly less than half of the students previously attended the trip. Future research would either have to include a large enough sample to compare students who have not completed any criminal justice courses to those who have (as well as those who had visited the prison previously) or control for the number of completed criminal justice courses over time.

In the wake of College cutbacks due to COVID-19, field trip budgets are in peril. Therefore, it may be more important than ever for educators to identify clear objectives for enrichment activities to necessitate their inclusion into curriculum. Many sites are creating virtual tours which may create challenges for conventional post tour assessment. Despite this, educators may be compelled to develop nuanced

ways to enrich curriculum in a virtual learning environment. Whether in person or virtual, this study highlights the academic value of prison field trips.

In conclusion, this study provides preliminary evidence supporting that students can acquire and retain content-specific, correctional based knowledge from participating in experiential learning opportunities, such as prison-based field trips. However, the knowledge acquired from these activities needs to be reinforced before, during, and after the experience through instruction and interactive exercises embedded in the criminal justice curriculum. This study also highlights the need to continue to explore the long-term effects of such trips as well as examine potential confounding variables that may impact knowledge retention over time. ■

## Notes

1. All surveys are available from authors upon request.
2. Greff (2008) and McLoughlin (2004) provide suggestions for creative and critical thinking writing assignments to apply knowledge gained.

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