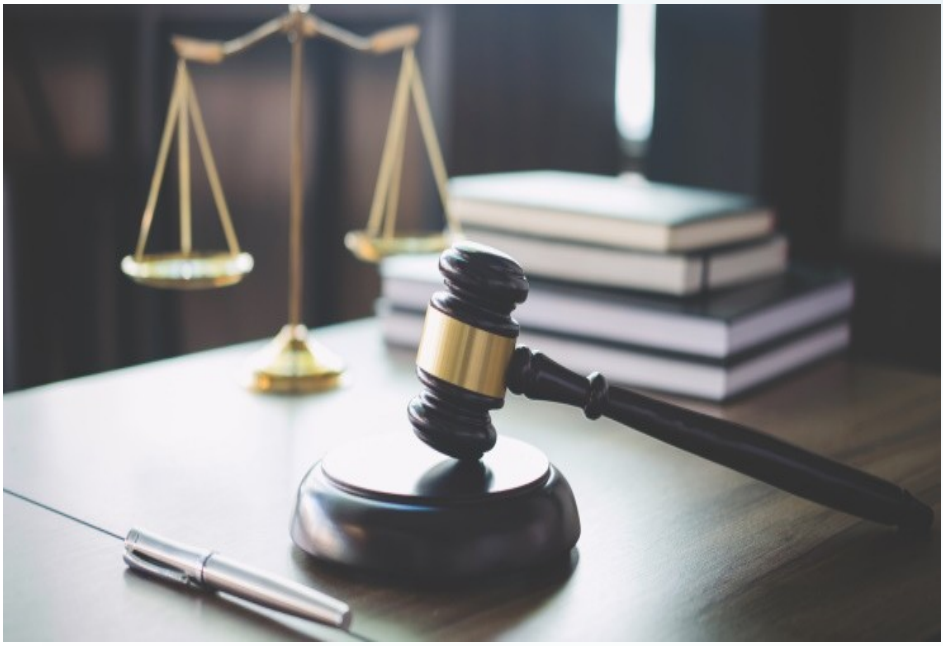
The Gavel



Spring 2026

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SECTION
APA DIVISION 18

Inside this issue

Recognizing our Student Section

Congratulations to the Criminal Justice Section's student section!

The Student Section recently hosted a webinar focused on doctoral psychology internships in public service settings, including VA hospitals, correctional facilities, and state psychiatric hospitals. The webinar featured five psychology trainees, including interns and postdoctoral fellows. Overall, the internship webinar was a success for the Student Section and helped strengthen the sense of community among attendees.

Special points of interest

Check out the request from the editors on page 16 for newsletter content.

Submissions can include;:

1) case law briefs related to issues in the criminal justice system,
2) reviews of books/articles,
3) training perspectives and developments (e.g., graduate, internship, and fellowship programs), and
4) case studies/ conceptualizations.

APA 2026 Convention: https://convention.apa.org/

2026 CJ SECTION AWARDS

Applications: Nominations should include the following:

A current CV of the nominee (within the past year).

A letter of nomination (one-two pages in length) describing why this nominee should be considered for the award (be sure to specify which award for whom you are nominating the individual).

For self-nominations, a letter of recommendation is required, as well as a one-two page narrative describing why you believe you should be considered for the award.

For the Dissertation Award, as mentioned earlier, you must also submit a copy of the dissertation, as well as a letter of support from the dissertation advisor that includes: acknowledgement that the student was nominated for the award; confirmation of the date of the dissertation defense; and a brief statement of his/her support or endorsement for the student being nominated for the award.

Please submit your nominations to cj@publicservicepsych.org by May 31.

See Award Descriptions on page 3

D18 Criminal Justice Section 2025 Award Winners

- **Meera Patel, PhD**; Outstanding Clinician Award
- **VanKe'via Garner, PhD**; Advocacy in Criminal Justice Psychology Award
- **Jade Horton, PhD**; Outstanding Student Award

2026 CJ SECTION AWARD DESCRIPTIONS

DUE 5/31/2026

Outstanding Psychology Student Award

This award is open to students at any stage of their graduate career (i.e., practicum students, psychology interns, and postdoctoral fellows). Nominees must have clinical and/or research experience with the criminal justice population. In addition to these experiences, nominees must have made accomplishments during his/her training that exceed expectations of his/her developmental level.

Outstanding Dissertation Award

The Outstanding Dissertation Award will be given to a person who has completed (defended) their dissertation within the last 18 months prior to the award deadline. The focus of the dissertation research should be related to the criminal justice population. Trainees who implemented any type of research (qualitative, quantitative, or theoretical) are encouraged to apply. In addition to the application requirements listed below, individuals nominated for this award also need to submit: a copy of the dissertation in either Word or PDF format and a letter of support from the dissertation advisor. The dissertation advisor does not have to be the person to nominate the trainee. The letter of support from the dissertation advisor should include: acknowledgement that the student was nominated for the award; confirmation of the date of the dissertation defense; and a brief statement of his/her support or endorsement for the student being nominated for the award.

Early Career Achievement Award

This award is open to individuals who earned their doctoral degree in psychology within the last 10 years. Nominees will have provided services to a criminal justice population in their career through clinical work and/or research. Overall, nominees will demonstrate, through their professional work, that they are dedicated to providing and improving services for those involved in the criminal justice system.

Outstanding Clinician Award

This award will be given to a psychologist who primarily provides direct clinical services to a criminal justice population and has done an outstanding job. The Awards Committee will look favorably upon those who have implemented and applied evidence based treatments to a criminal justice population; the committee is particularly interested in hearing about new and inventive clinical applications to a criminal justice population. The committee will also look favorably upon those psychologists who have worked collaboratively with others in their workplace to promote the application of appropriate clinical interventions. This award may be given to a psychologist with any number of years of experience.

Advocacy in Criminal Justice Psychology Award

This award is intended for a mid- to late-career psychologist who has a long-standing and observable dedication to advocacy in criminal justice settings and for justice-involved populations. The committee is especially interested in recognizing individuals who have been influential in improving social justice and equity through both awareness and action. The recipient is someone who is not only an unwavering voice for those who are underserved and marginalized, but they are also guided in their efforts by good science.

Dimensional Models of Psychopathology in Forensic Mental Health Assessment: The AMPD in New York State Article 10 Proceedings

By Alex M. Ray, B.S. & Sandra Thomas, M.S.

Nature: Use of the DSM-5 Alternative Model for Personality Disorders (AMPD) to support a diagnosis of Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD) in a Sex Offender Civil Management proceeding under New York Mental Hygiene Law Article 10.

Facts and Procedure: Nicholas T. was detained by the State of New York (NYS) pursuant to Article 10 of its Mental Hygiene Law. NYS Article 10 permits management of individuals convicted of qualifying sex offenses who are suffering from a "mental abnormality" that predisposes them to commit offenses and/or results in serious difficulty controlling such behavior. As part of the Article 10 evaluation, the State's forensic evaluator diagnosed Nicholas T. with Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD). Notably, the diagnosis was aided by the DSM-5 Alternative Model for Personality Disorders (AMPD). The state's expert testified that Nicholas demonstrated significant impairments in Criterion A level of personality functioning and exhibited pathological personality traits consistent with Criterion B. The defense challenged the admissibility of this opinion, arguing that ASPD is a categorical diagnosis and that reliance on the AMPD was insufficient to establish a qualifying "mental abnormality" under Article 10.

Issue: Can courts rely on expert testimony using the AMPD to support a finding of "mental abnormality" under NYS's Mental Hygiene Law Article 10?

Holding: The court held that testimony relying on the AMPD is credible and may support a finding that Nicholas T. satisfies the criteria for ASPD and a qualifying mental abnormality under Article 10.

Rationale: The court reasoned that Article 10 does not mandate adherence to a single diagnostic framework, nor does it require that mental abnormalities be established exclusively through categorical DSM diagnoses. Instead, the statute requires proof of a condition affecting emotional, cognitive, or volitional capacity that predisposes the individual to commit sex offenses and causes serious difficulty controlling behavior.

The court found that the AMPD is included within DSM-5 and reflects contemporary scientific understanding of personality pathology. The State's expert explained the AMPD framework, its empirical grounding, and how Nicholas's impairments aligned with ASPD relevant to sexual offending risk. Importantly, the court emphasized that diagnostic labels are less critical than the functional impact of the disorder, and that the AMPD provided a clinically sound basis for understanding.

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Matter of State of New York v. Nicholas T., 2017 NY Slip Op 27077 (Sup. Ct. N.Y. Cnty. Mar. 9, 2017). Retrieved from https://www.nycourts.gov/reporter//3dseries/2017/2017_27077.htm

The Role of Juror Mental Health Experience in Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity Verdicts

By Madison Albracht, PsyD
Center for Behavioral Medicine

This study examined whether jurors' personal mental health experience (i.e., psychiatric diagnosis) influence verdict decisions, therefore perception of criminal responsibility, in cases involving a defense of not guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI). Although jurors are instructed to base verdict decisions solely on the evidence presented at trial, a substantial body of literature demonstrates that extralegal factors meaningfully affect juror decision-making. Using a logistic regression, prior research by Albracht and Behnken (2019) found that jurors' mental health experiences were a significant predictor of NGRI verdicts. The present study built upon this finding by investigating whether specific categories of juror psychiatric diagnosis, as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V), differentially predicted verdict outcomes.

Undergraduate and graduate student participants from Iowa State University served as mock jurors and reviewed a standardized case vignette in which the defendant pled NGRI. Verdict determinations were based on prongs of the M'Naghten standard. Participants self-reported whether they had received a psychiatric diagnosis. If so, participants were asked to indicate, based on a provided list, which DSM-V category their diagnosis belongs. The primary hypothesis predicted that jurors diagnosed with trauma- and stressor-related disorders, schizophrenia-spectrum disorders, or neurodevelopmental disorders would be more likely to return an NGRI verdict than jurors without a psychiatric diagnosis.

Due to insufficient representation of schizophrenia-spectrum diagnoses, this category was excluded from primary analyses. A weighted logistic regression was conducted to assess whether diagnostic category predicted verdict outcome. Results did not support the primary hypothesis, as none of the targeted diagnostic categories significantly predicted an NGRI verdict relative to jurors without a psychiatric diagnosis. Exploratory analyses, however, revealed statistically significant effects for anxiety (B = 0.799, SE = 0.264, Wald = 9.125, p = .003, Exp(B) = 2.223, 95% CI [1.324, 3.733]) and depressive disorders (B = 0.676, SE = 0.322, Wald = 4.412 , p = .036, Exp(B) = 1.966, 95%, CI [1.046, 3.693). Jurors who endorsed these diagnostic categories were significantly more likely to render an NGRI verdict, perceiving the defendant to not be criminally responsible, compared to jurors without a psychiatric diagnosis.

The Performance of Punishment

By Sun Park

"Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping?" Shakespeare's words are less a straight endorsement of punishment and more of a reflection on the impracticality and potential absurdity of retributive justice. Modern criminal justice systems, enthralled by the idea of payback, measure punishment in suffering, believing that proportional pain can restore moral balance. This cruel, archaic, and disturbing logic still anchors and has hardened into the roots of our criminal justice systems today. We've mistaken punishment for principle. We've built institutions that confuse suffering with accountability and vengeance with fairness. That contradicts the true nature of justice; it's moral laziness and failure, dressed up as law. And this failure isn't theoretical; it defines our reality. In the United Kingdom, prisons have become so overcrowded that inmates are released early, not because they have shown improvement, but because there is no physical space for more occupance. In the United States, the punishment routinely exceeds the sentence itself; disenfranchisement, social exclusion, and stigma that follow them throughout their lives. Of course, these systems were not designed with cruelty as the goal.The UK's crisis stems in part from systemic delays and under-resourced courts; in the U.S., the roots run deep into a history of racial injustice and carceral excess. Yet, understanding the provenance of these issues do nothing to remedy the structural problems. Conceptualizing criminal justice as not only an institutional mechanism but a method through which societies can convey its underlying philosophies, a less retributive jurisprudence is not only an effective pathway towards solving practical problems, but it's also necessary in order to ensure more people escape the unnecessary cruelty of whipping.

However, prior to any serious evaluation, it is important to note that due to my own experiences, the scope of this analysis will focus on the criminal justice systems of the United States and England and Wales, primarily through a jurisprudential lens. These limits aim to clarify the first principles of justice: leaning towards forgiving and forgetting, rather than being as suffering-orientated as possible.

The inevitable starting point is H. L. A. Hart, who arguably best conceptualizes justice as a system of primary and secondary rules through which society sends a message to individuals, guiding behavior rather than through any metaphorical guns to the head. (Hart) According to Hart, justice functions by providing a clear structure within which society communicates its expectations and norms. This contrasts with earlier thinkers like John Austin, who reduced law to a series of commands backed by threats; rules obeyed out of fear, rather than recognition. In Austin's view, legal authority is preserved through coercion; in Hart's it is sustained through understanding and legitimacy. However, what happens when understanding and legitimacy is affected by a retributive mindset, one which has led to mass incarcerations and vindictive post-sentencing outcomes? What happens when criminal justice leads to increasingly harsher sentences? What happens when the purpose of criminal justice deviates from the actual "justice" and no longer sends an effective message to communities?

These are the questions that compel a complete re-imagining of criminal justice - and in no way is this a radical proposal. Whether it's William Blackstone and his ratio where "It is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer" or contemporary legal scholars like Don E. Scheid who argue against the fundamentally rooted assumption of punishment that punishment is, by definition, about giving someone what they 'deserve' and intentionally inflicting pain, there is consistent scholarship supporting the view that retribution should not drive criminal justice: it delivers the wrong message to both the offender and the public. (Scheid)

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Scheid's articulation of this problem is actually particularly insightful, as he identifies four core elements of contemporary punishment. Using S.I. Benn's revised definition, Scheid notes how punishment has devolved into strict categories where it:

I. Must be an evil, an unpleasantness, to the victim
II. Must be for an offense
III. Must be or at least be supposed to be of an offender
IV. Must be or at least be supposed to be imposed by virtue of authority, conferred through or by the institutions against the laws or rules of which the offense has been committed

Notably absent from this definition is any claim that punishment must be morally deserved. This idea that some people ought to be punished is a projection of what society considers to be just or morally deserving rather than the conceptual requirement of punishment per se. In other words, the suffering that is associated with punishment is something society decides to enforce rather than something that the definition requires. In that sense, the implications are clear: we are not bound to punitive excess as a moral necessity. Rather, we choose to tie punishment to suffering because it fits a narrative of retribution we have implicated into our system. As Judge Michael H. Marcus rightly states, "punishment serves no purpose other than to maintain the facade of just deserts." (Scheid) But that narrative can be rejected. If we accept that punishment is socially constructed, then we must also accept that it can evolve. Retribution may satisfy an immediate sense of order, but only restoration builds a future.

Yet, what is the practical manifestation of that future? If justice is a reflection of what society chooses to value, then its institutions are the infrastructure in which they are practiced and which that message is enforced. To drift away from a system grounded in suffering and toward one that centers reintegration, we must do so by reinforcing the mechanisms that most visibly embody punishment.

Taking pre-sentencing measures as an initial step, significant reform can be achieved when it comes to specific areas like Victim Impact Statements (VIS). Originally introduced in 1982 in light of the Manson murders, VIS became part of settled law in *Payne v. Tennessee*, when Chief Justice Rehnquist, citing Justice White in Booth, that "[T]he State has a legitimate interest in counteracting the mitigating evidence which the defendant is entitled to put in, by reminding the sentencer that just as the murderer should be considered as an individual, so too the victim is an individual." (Rehnquist) However, nearly half a decade of jurisprudence has shown how VIS have also evolved into a dangerous tool for subjective evaluation. Leading criminal justice scholars from other common law jurisdictions like Andrew Ashworth have noted how VIS have been "exploited as a back door means to increase penalties and their social control." (Garkawe) This causes a dramatic shift from the criminal justice system's purpose to be grounded in an objective stance, communicating clear messages in the form of a widely-accepted rule of recognition, and more prone towards emotional escalation. The result is a patchwork of punishment driven not by law, but by narrative and emotion: "VIS would thus increase the unpredictability of the outcome, detracting from the proper functioning and purpose of the criminal justice system." (Garkawe) Susan Bandes similarly argues that VIS is not appropriate to be in use of a legal context as it "appeal[s] to hatred, the desire for undifferentiated vengeance, and even bigotry." (Bandes) From this line of reasoning, abolishing VIS does not mean taking away the opportunity for victims to express their experiences, but rather ensuring that the legal system does not devolve into a stage for vengeance and for "an eye for an eye." Justice must not be reduced to a contest of pain.

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Except, there may be light at the end of the tunnel. Specifically highlighted by the Commissioner of the Office of the General Council, *Erlinger v. United States* held that, albeit for the specific purpose of applying the Armed Career Criminal Act, increasing a sentence based on whether previous offenses occurred on "separate occasions" must be determined by a jury, not a judge. (Litman) It's a decision that contemporary legal scholars have cited, with notable enthusiasm, as being "a big deal, and *Erlinger* hasn't gotten nearly the attention it deserves." (Flanders) What *Erlinger* essentially does is shift the perspective on past convictions from an almost-strict liability lens to a more evaluative assessment by a jury to decide whether past convictions constitute one actus reus or multiple. Indeed, this shift is not just procedural but also philosophical, which Chad Flanders notes as being a decision that moves "the power to decide" criminal histories as variable factors - a reminder that criminal justice demands interpretation not calculation.

But incarceration does not end when the sentence has been due; it simply changes form and tags the offender along for years on end. As Michelle Alexander argues in The New Jim Crow, " a criminal freed from prison has scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a freed slave or a black person living "free" in Mississippi at the height of Jim Crow." (Alexander 141) This dehumanizing, yet realistic portrayal of our world brings forward the brutal nature of the criminal justice system. For the smallest offenses, parolees may be reincarcerated and may be stopped and searched without a particular cause. And even once formal supervision ends, the social stigma surrounding criminality persists. For many, especially BIPOC individuals, merely "looking like" a criminal becomes enough to justify police monitoring and harassment. Lynch mobs may be gone, but as Alexander notes, their legacy lives on through the ever-present threat of police violence, where even a wrong gesture or a wallet mistaken for a gun can lead to fatal consequences.

Indeed, even beyond the pre and post sentencing mechanisms, the deadly and outdated whipping continues. In states like Florida, Iowa, and Kentucky, felony disenfranchisement laws extend to the point where states "disenfranchise all individuals with felony convictions for life unless they secure clemency from the governor." (Porter and McLeod) If we accept that the true purpose of justice is transformation, then criminal records must not function as civil death sentences. In fact, even historically, reform efforts have often been driven by the belief that criminal behavior is not a cast-iron moral failure, but more what can be redirected through structured intervention. From 17th century Quakers who built the Eastern State Prison in Philadelphia being "certain that ordered incarceration and isolation would produce penitence" to 20th century rehabilitationists who came to the belief that crime should be treated as a disease, criminal justice has rarely been as dehumanizingly cruel as it is today. (Marcus) The commonly known phrase, "an eye for an eye," also known as *lex talionis*, is found in both the Code of Hammurabi (2500 BCE) and the Hebrew Bible. Far from being radical or new, these ancient, rehabilitative ideals have been etched into roots of justice.

By what we call "punishing" offenders, we not only dehumanize those we imprison, but also reinforce a ritual of punishment that prioritizes facade over actual justice. Our justice system has become a circus, blind-sighted by applause from the public, continuously putting performance and outward moral values over true recomposition of the offender's humanity. The deepest roots that shape our system now come from ancient codes to early reformers, manifesting that mercy and rehabilitation are not novel inventions, but have been with our system from the start. If we are to move beyond a system that confuses pain with principle, we must move beyond a hollow performance of punishment and instead embrace a vision of justice that is humane, honest, and transformative.

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Are We There Yet?
Formalizing Core Competencies for Correctional Psychology

By Lewis J. Peiper, Ph.D.

The historical record suggests that correctional psychology is far from a nascent field. In *The Handbook of Correctional Psychology*, Lindner and Seliger (1947) characterized the discipline as a "relatively new specialty," yet their analysis traced significant developmental milestones back to the first quarter of the 20th century. However, nearly 80 years after those fragile yellowing pages were printed, the field remains in a state of perpetual definition as efforts to delineate the boundaries (Neal, 2018) of this 100-plus-year-old specialty continue well into the 21st century.

The current state of the profession is characterized by a significant tension between clinical necessity and scientific rigor. Magaletta and Patry (2020) identify a critical deficit: the lack of a shared scientific research foundation to inform advanced practice. For psychologists embedded within prisons and jails, the daily demands often dictate a focus on "getting the job done" by prioritizing immediate institutional needs over the broader elevation of the profession. This reality has hindered the collective development of a cohesive professional identity and limited the field's ability to influence broader correctional policy through effective dissemination (and integrated implementation) of evidence-based practices.

If the challenge for modern correctional psychologists is to elevate the specialty, the next logical step involves the formalization of training standards. To move toward an advanced community of practice, the field must establish a rigorous set of core competencies designed specifically for the correctional environment.

The implementation of these competencies within doctoral internship programs offers a strategic "entry-point" for systemic change. By codifying specialized skills—ranging from institutional safety integration with care to the application of cutting-edge treatment interventions, the profession can ensure that the next generation of psychologists enters the field with a clear, specialized identity.

Correctional Psychology Doctoral Internships

As noted by Morgan and Oliver (2023), the doctoral internship serves as the critical capstone year for future correctional psychologists. While generalist doctoral programs provide a broad theoretical foundation, the specialized development of the correctional psychologist occurs primarily through immersive, applied practice within carceral settings.

This training model has deep historical roots (no pun intended), beginning with William Root in 1923 at the University of Pittsburgh (Magaletta & Travers, 2023). Dr. Root's pioneering work at Western State Penitentiary focusing on intellectual testing and psychological evaluations of incarcerated populations established a blueprint for the "embedded" correctional psychology internship. However, despite this early start, the growth of such programs has remained surprisingly limited.

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A contemporary review of the Association of Psychology Post-Doctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC) directory highlights the scope of dedicated correctional training sites. While 54 internships report a connection to correctional facilities, many offer only rotational or consortium-based exposure or a training track among other foci. When narrowed to internships fully embedded within adult prison systems, the field appears to be represented by only seven accredited systems: the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and the Departments of Correction (DOCs) in California, Florida, Illinois (site visit scheduled), Minnesota, North Carolina, and Wisconsin.

Together, these systems account for 25 sites and 153 internship positions, a small portion of the 3,969 total positions available in the 2026 APPIC Phase 1 cycle. This scarcity suggests a significant missed opportunity for the profession, especially when contrasted with the high levels of satisfaction and retention reported by those who pursue this path.

The evidence for the efficacy of correctional internships is compelling. Research indicates that these settings provide an excellent degree of core training, with interns reporting high levels of preparedness for future clinical work (Pietz et al., 1998). Furthermore, interest in the field often increases *during* the internship year, countering the common misconception that carceral environments lead to rapid burnout among trainees.

The longitudinal data is also persuasive. Magaletta et al. (2012) found that across 25 years, more than half of BOP interns sought permanent employment in correctional settings. However, recent data from Chmielewski et al. (2026) shows an even stronger trend, with 72% of interns transitioning into post-doctoral correctional employment.

The recognition that specialized training is critical for the carceral environment is not a new phenomenon. As early as 1974, Ingram identified that high turnover rates among correctional psychologists were a direct symptom of inadequate preparation for the unique clinical and ethical complexities of the setting. Ingram's early work to establish a correctional psychology training program with Florida State University established a significant precedent: a sequential training taxonomy designed to bridge the gap between academic theory and the reality of applied practice within the prison environment (Bartol & Freeman, 2012).

A Multi-Association Strategic Response

Building upon the 100 plus year history of correctional psychology, a national coalition has emerged to formalize the specialty's professional identity. The Behavioral Health Committee of the American Correctional Association (ACA), the National Institute of Correction (NIC) Mental Health Network, and the APA Division 18 Criminal Justice Section have partnered to launch a core competency training initiative for correctional psychology interns.

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Are We There Yet?
Formalizing Core Competencies for Correctional Psychology

By Lewis J. Peiper, Ph.D.

This inter-association partnership moves beyond local efforts to establish a national training series. This initiative is a direct response to two converging crises: the disproportionately high prevalence of mental illness within incarcerated populations and the chronic shortage of specialized behavioral health clinicians. The core competency initiative is designed to move the field from an ad-hoc training model to a structured curriculum. By targeting doctoral internships, the initiative seeks to achieve four primary goals:

1. **Enhancement of Professional Competency:** Moving beyond generalist skills to provide specialized training on the legal, ethical, and clinical nuances inherent in carceral work.
2. **Dissemination of Evidence-Based Best Practices:** Ensuring that interventions within prison walls are informed by the most recent scientific research, thereby addressing the "shared foundation" gap noted by Magaletta and Patry (2020).
3. **Cultivation of a Community of Practice:** Transitioning from isolated practitioners to a robust network of professionals through collaborative case discussions and expert mentorship.
4. **Democratization of Training via the ECHO Model (**Arora et al., 2010)**:** To overcome the geographic and institutional isolation of many prison systems, the initiative will utilize the Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) model. This hub-and-spoke knowledge-sharing approach allows interns in remote or under-resourced systems to access high-level expertise alongside their peers in larger systems (Moss et al., 2024).

To bridge the gap between historical aspirations and modern practice, the proposed training initiative is designed as a dynamic, ongoing inter-association program. By connecting Internship Training Directors (TDs) from the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and the state Departments of Correction (DOCs), the initiative will establish a unified "Community of Practice" that transcends individual system silos.

The Project ECHO Platform

The training initiative will use the **Project ECHO** model, hosted by the American Correctional Association's (ACA) ECHO Hub. This "hub-and-spoke" knowledge-sharing framework moves away from traditional lectures in favor of a collaborative learning environment. Each session is structured into two distinct phases:

1. **Foundational Didactics:** A subject matter expert (SME) delivers a high-level lecture on a core competency.
2. **Iterative Case-Based Learning:** Interns and staff engage in interactive case presentations and group discussions, applying theoretical concepts to real-world carceral challenges.

A Collaborative Curriculum

The curriculum development is led by a **Correctional Psychology Training Committee**, comprised of veteran licensed psychologists. In a move toward systemic standardization, Training Directors from the participating DOCs and the BOP are collectively engaged in the logistical planning. This ensures the curriculum maximizes foundational breadth while fitting seamlessly into the existing training sequences at individual internship sites.

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Are We There Yet?
Formalizing Core Competencies for Correctional Psychology

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Core Competency Domains

The initiative has identified eight domains of expertise required for the modern correctional psychologist (additional collaboration with training partners will refine these domains to a final set of core competencies):

Foundational Principles: Historical evolution of the field and its unique professional identity.

Environment & Operations: Navigating the dual-relationship dynamics between clinical care and custody operations.

Trauma-Informed Care: Applying specialized principles to a population with ubiquitous trauma exposure.

Assessment & Evaluation: Validated tools and techniques for risk of violence and self-harm; specialized assessments for malingering, capacity, and neurocognitive concerns; and defensible report writing.

Therapeutic Interventions: Adapting Evidence-Based Treatments (like CBT, DBT) for the unique carceral environment. Risk-Needs-Responsivity and Bi-Adaptive approaches to rehabilitative treatment.

Crisis & Risk Formulation: Protocols for self-directed violence, acute psychosis, and high-stakes risk formulation.

Ethical & Legal Mandates: Constitutional minimums of care (e.g., *Estelle v. Gamble*, *Farmer v. Brennan*, *Bowring v Godwin, Vitek v. Jones*, and *Washington v. Harper*), ethical decisional making, and positive ethics.

Wellness, Self-Care, & Resilience: Evidence-based strategies to mitigate burnout and secondary traumatic stress in high-demand settings.

Partnership Structure

The success of this competency-based initiative relies on a robust inter-association framework. By aligning the specialized expertise of three major national bodies, the program ensures that training is clinically rigorous, operationally sound, and historically grounded.

- **The American Correctional Association (ACA) Behavioral Health Committee:** As the oldest professional association for correctional practitioners (est. 1870), the ACA provides the structural authority for this initiative. The Behavioral Health Committee serves as the primary engine for member engagement, reviewing practice standards and disseminating new knowledge across multidisciplinary teams.
- **The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) Mental Health Network:** The NIC provides the essential link to federal, state, and large urban system mental health directors. By focusing on competency-based leadership and peer mentoring, the NIC ensures the initiative remains sustainable and responsive to emerging organizational challenges.
- **American Psychological Association (APA) Division 18 (Psychologists in Public Service), Criminal Justice Section:** Representing the frontline researcher-practitioners, this section provides the clinical, academic, and ethical heart of the partnership. Their focus on the specific challenges of assessment, treatment, and professional support within prison walls ensures the curriculum remains grounded in the scientific, peer-reviewed practices as they evolve.

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Formalizing Core Competencies for Correctional Psychology

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Evaluation and Milestones

The initiative includes a structured evaluation framework:

- **Process Milestones:** Tracking the formalization of Training Director connections, the codification of core competencies, and the successful launch of the shared curriculum.
- **Outcome Metrics:** Utilizing participant surveys, longitudinal attendance tracking, and the integration of the core competencies into the formal intern evaluations completed at participating sites. This cre ates a feedback loop between the national curriculum and individual professional growth.

Scalability: Beyond the Doctoral Psychology Internship

While the doctoral internship is the immediate target, the core competencies and curriculum developed through this partnership are envisioned as foundational resources for the broader field. The framework is designed to be adaptable for:

- **Program Expansion:** Serving as a blueprint for establishing new internships in detention centers / jails and juvenile justice facilities.
- **Post-Doctoral Specialization:** Formulating the basis for advanced post-doctoral fellowships in Correctional Psychology.
- **Interdisciplinary Application:** Providing a standardized training model that can be adapted for other critical behavioral health disciplines (e.g., clinical social work, clinical mental health counseling) operating within correctional systems.

Conclusion

The maturation of correctional psychology requires a transition from a workforce defined by its environment to a specialty defined by its expertise. The contrast between the limited number of correctional training slots and the high retention rate of graduates suggests that the correctional psychology internship is a highly effective, yet underutilized, vehicle for workforce development. To move toward an advanced community of practice, it is not enough to simply have more sites; we must ensure that these internship positions are guided by the core competencies previously discussed. By formalizing what Ax and Morgan (2002) identified as excellent training experiences, the field can capitalize on high trainee satisfaction to build a more robust, specialized, and permanent workforce.

As the field enters its second century, the transition from "getting the job done" to an advanced community of practice is finally within reach. By standardizing core competencies and leveraging inter-association partnerships, the profession can ensure that the "fragile yellowing pages" of its history are replaced by a vibrant, data-driven, and highly specialized future. The doctoral internship is not just a capstone; it can become the forge for the future of correctional psychology. By formalizing these competencies, the inter-association partnership between the ACA, NIC, and APA Division 18 seeks to do more than just fill staffing gaps; it aims to professionalize "Correctional Psychology" as a distinct, elite specialty.

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Formalizing Core Competencies for Correctional Psychology

By Lewis J. Peiper, Ph.D.

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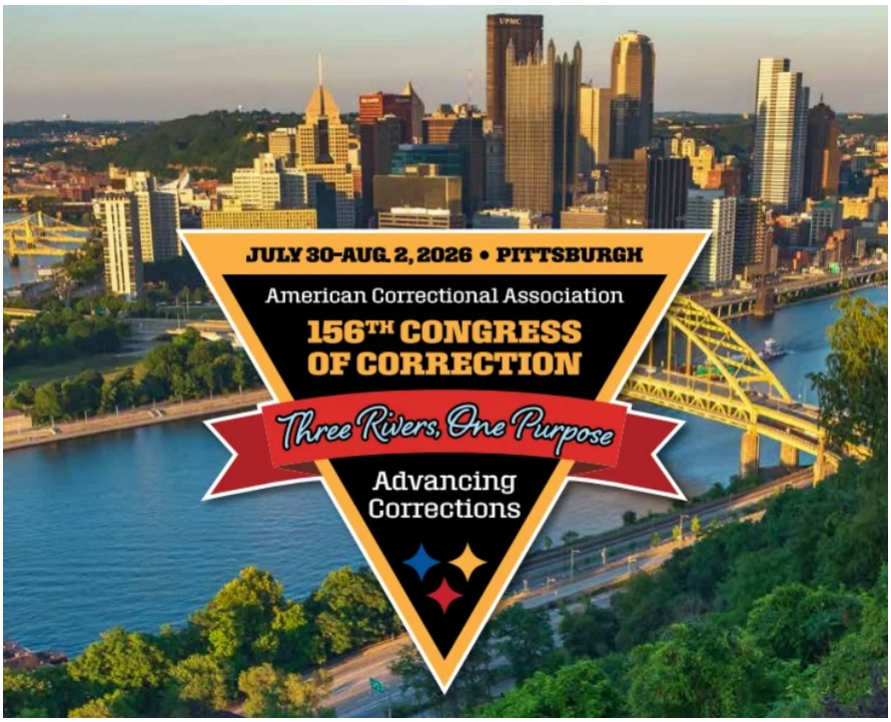

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