Taxpayers spend billions of dollars each year on the funding of prisons and jails. Each year, the inmate population continues to grow, and recently stood at 1.5 million (DiMascio, 1995), but solutions to the growing prison population, which contains many repeat offenders, remain elusive. On the other hand, although few and far between, educational programs have been proven to help reduce recidivism rates.

Inmates exposed to education programs have lower recidivism rates than do non-participants (The Prison Education Research Project, 1994). Black (1996) supports this assertion, claiming that academic and vocational education are highly efficient ways to reduce recidivism and that money for the education of the incarcerated is well spent. Rios (1996), an expert in methods used to teach prisoners, claims that teaching critical thinking skills and social skills is central to reaching prisoners. Academic and vocational education leads to fewer disciplinary violations during incarceration, increases in employment opportunities, and increases in participation in education upon release, ultimately leading to reduced recidivism rates (Jurg, 1995). Scott (1994) found a direct correlation between communication activity and recidivism. He evaluated the effectiveness of Operation Kick-It, a program in which Texas prisoners engaged in rehabilitation by dissuading others from the decisions they themselves had made. Imprisoned drug offenders described their criminal histories and their consequences to deter young people from committing similar crimes. Recidivism among participants was significantly lower than among non-participants. Other advantageous and serviceable programs, such as the Toastmasters' helpful endeavors to reach inmates, undertake to demonstrate productive communication skills in order to increase
prisoners' awareness of the outside world and to make reintegration less difficult (Black, 1993).

Dallao (1996) demonstrated that constructive, skill-building educational programs are vital to the protection of our society. The communication skills offered in competitive forensics are the same skills needed to help prisoners reenter society successfully. Therefore, educational programs in prisons should be expanded to include the development and facilitation of speech and debate clubs within prison facilities. This paper offers such a rationale and describes and evaluate a program implemented by the Central Michigan University Debate and Forensic Team.

A RATIONALE FOR ESTABLISHING A FORENSIC CLUB AT CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Several researchers have explored the benefits of participation in competitive forensics. Hunt (1994) offers the most complete analysis of specific knowledge and skills that are improved from participation. Hunt asserts that forensics may lead to social skill development in the following ten ways: teaches the function of democratic societies; improves the critical, reflective, and creative thinking skills of competitors; enhances the understanding and application of research; emphasizes the necessity of proof for claims; improves organization and arrangement skills; improves language style usage; develops listening and note taking skills; improves public speaking skills; teaches the ethics of advocacy; and stimulates thinking about current events and controversies. Allen, Berkowitz, and Louden (1995) agree. They found that argumentation and forensics participation increases critical thinking skills. They claimed a clear benefit to competitive forensics, because their study discovered that persons who participate demonstrate a larger gain in critical thinking skills over those acquired in an introductory speech communication course. McMillan and Mancillas (1991) explored the advantages of competitive forensics. Improved self-esteem, more learning, and improved skills are all acquired from participation. In
regard to self-esteem, competitors perceive a sense of personal accomplishment and self-confidence. Educationally, competitors believe they receive "real world" skills, knowledge of people, and the ability to think quickly. Students competing in forensics perceive the development of skills in research, oral communication, critical thinking, organization, and writing. Beyond skill attainment, the competitive nature of forensics stimulates desire, commitment, and high motivation in students. Shelton (1994/1995) asserts that the competitive nature of forensics tournaments drives competitors to spend long hours in preparation, practice and performance, and he also argues that the above communication skills are important for they provide students with a voice in the operation of the world around them, which promotes individual empowerment.

Skills in communication are needed to help prisoners function upon reentering society. Correctional education programs, such as the one proposed, help prevent inmates from returning to crime by making their reintegration into society easier (Dallao, 1996). Social skills must be included within a successful correctional education program (Rios, 1996). Because communication skills are integral to empowerment (Shelton, 1994/1995), they must be taught by qualified individuals, and Shelton argues that forensic educators are the key to providing individual empowerment, through communication skills instruction, to their students.

Although the desire to reach out to the community should be based on altruistic motivations, Preston and Jensen (1995) assert that community service can lead to positive public relations for a forensics team. Therefore, it becomes important for forensic educators and competitors to engage in this type of activity.

In response to the needs discussed above, and in response to a particular call by the Ionia Temporary Correctional Facility [ITCF] in Ionia, Michigan, for such a program, the Central Michigan University Speech and Debate Team helped establish a Prison Speech and Debate Club. At the beginning of the Fall 1996 semester, the Assistant Correctional Athletic Director of the ITCF
sought our assistance in providing resources and expertise that might contribute to the birth of a speech and debate club at the prison. Prison officials argued that programs that invite inmates to utilize and develop intellectual skills contribute to the mission of the correctional facility. Unlike life outside prison walls, there is little to do at a correctional facility. Because individual events and Lincoln-Douglas require a time commitment in order to be successful, they provide an additional "something to do" for the inmates. The coaching staff and students enthusiastically supported visiting the prison and providing a valuable service to the inmates.

PROGRAM AT THE IONIA TEMPORARY CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, IONIA, MICHIGAN

In order to make the first visit possible, several preparatory actions had to be taken. First, the coaching staff and competitors determined the scope of the project. Potentially, we could have provided instruction in each of the events offered at collegiate tournaments. However, the personnel and time resources were simply unavailable to do so. We decided to test the waters by offering three events—poetry interpretation, persuasive speaking, and Lincoln-Douglas debate: poetry because we assumed prison inmates would enjoy sharing and performing poetry they had written during their stay in prison, or poetry written by others; persuasive speaking because it entails research, organization, writing, thinking, argumentation, and presentation skills; and Lincoln-Douglas debate because it offers an organized format for asserting personal claims and dissecting the claims of others on critical issues, and it also offers the most intense level of competition of these three events because participants literally compete directly against one another participant.

We needed to determine how many times we would visit the prison. The busy schedules of forensic competitors and coaches made numerous trips unfeasible. Also, our main objective was to provide guidance in the development of the speech and debate club,
not to operate and monitor it. Just as numerous visits were not feasible, they were also unnecessary in order to accomplish our objective. The team decided upon three visits during a four month period. The first visit would include explanation, demonstration, and discussion of each of the three events we chose to offer. The second visit would include coaching on the content of speeches, poetry selections, and debate cases. The third visit would consist of a Facility Individual Events Tournament, judged and operated by the Central Michigan Speech and Debate team. Although we originally planned three trips, we actually took four. After the second visit, we decided on an extra trip that taught the techniques of delivery.

All participants in this service-learning project had to be lien-cleared by the State of Michigan for entrance into the prison and acquisition of volunteer status. Any student who presented a security threat would be identified through this process. Each volunteer completed a form on which they had to disclose their name, birth date, driver's license, Social Security number, height, and weight. In our case, this information needed to be completed and sent in at least one month prior to visitation.

Dates and times needed to be determined. The chaotic nature of volunteer schedules made this difficult. Although we originally suspected Saturdays would be best for volunteers, the first two visits occurred on a Thursday. Times also needed to be negotiated. Thursday trips usually began in the afternoon and concluded in the evening. Saturday trips began early in the morning and led into the early afternoon.

Materials needed to be sent ahead of time. Basic information about the events, especially Lincoln-Douglas debate, was sent to the ITCF prior to our arrival, which allowed persons interested in the activity to peruse materials and to develop some knowledge before the first workshop.

The Visits

All visits entailed several constants. Each time, volunteers
were required to present identification, to leave all valuables in a locker, and to submit to a body search from an officer before entering the facilities.

The first visit was the most crucial as it was the most intensive. Approximately fifty prisoners attended the workshop, which included an explanation, demonstration, and discussion of each event. The agenda was determined prior to arrival (see Appendix A). The inmates were invited to begin work on one or more of the three events presented. At the conclusion of the presentations, prisoners were welcome to introduce themselves to the volunteers and have short conversations before we left the prison.

The second visit was designed to provide the inmates with one-to-one coaching sessions regarding the content of their performance material. The athletic director of the ITCF established three work stations to work with CMU student coaches. Each inmate received feedback on the quality of his work. Poetry selections were evaluated in regards to their literary quality and performability. Persuasion texts were evaluated in regards to their organization, use of evidence, and stylistic choices. Lincoln-Douglas, with the smallest number of participants, was explained in more detail during the second visit to inmates interested in debating "ebonies in education."

We realized that an additional visit was necessary. Few, if any, of the inmates had any experience in public speaking. Therefore, each inmate was given an opportunity to rehearse their events. All speakers performed and received feedback on each of their events from two coaches. Performances were presented on a stage built by the inmates under the athletic director's supervision.

The fourth visit was the most exciting and, perhaps, rewarding visit of the four, as we participated in the first ITCF individual events tournament. We simulated a college tournament with eleven competitors in poetry interpretation, five competitors in persuasive speaking, and two competitors in Lincoln-Douglas debate. Although small in relation to an average college tournament, a total of eighteen entries was an encouraging sign. Poetry had two
preliminary rounds judged by CMU volunteers, and the top six made finals. With only five competitors in persuasion, each persuasive speaker qualified for finals; likewise, preliminary rounds of Lincoln-Douglas debate were unnecessary with just two speakers. The top six poetry performances, the top five persuasive speeches and the only Lincoln-Douglas debate were performed in an all-purpose hall. Inmates who did not compete were allowed to watch the finalist performances. At one point, forty spectators were present. Scores were tabulated after the final round performances, and shortly thereafter the awards ceremony began in front of an audience of approximately sixty inmates. Certificates were given to each participant, indicating they had successfully completed the requirements of the program. Rank-ordered certificates were given to the six poetry finalists, the five persuasion finalists and the two Lincoln-Douglas debaters.

THE PROGRAM'S ASSESSMENT

We assessed the success of the 1996-1997 program in four ways: student experience summaries, ITCF verbal and written responses, evidence of inmate involvement, and public responses.

Student experience summaries assessed the value of the program from the volunteers’ perspectives. Several student participants wrote 2-5 page reflection papers. In their papers, students were asked to discuss what they learned about themselves, what they learned about those they coached, and what role speech communication played in the success of this project. Although apprehensive at first, students shared stories of interpersonal growth. Two excerpts illustrate the nature of the service-learning project, for students commented on what they and the inmates learned, and on how they served, and were served by, the inmates. One student reflected upon the damaging nature of stereotypes:

I think that the prisoners taught us about as much as we had taught them. Our society has an image of
prisoners as really bad people. This is probably true. At the same time, however, I guess that I discovered for the first time that these inmates were also parents, children, uncles and brothers. They had feelings and talents just like everyone else. The circumstances that placed them in prison didn't really concern me; it was really exciting to see these men open up and share their stories in their poetry and other pieces. These men had a lot of untapped talents that could easily be brought to fruition with work. The stereotypes and barriers that had been established at the thought of doing this kind of project were slowly brought down. (Immings, 1997)

Another student reflected a new understanding of human nature:

At first, I was a little apprehensive. Would the guys be mean and cause problems? Would it be uncomfortable being in such close quarters with convicts? When I look back to those early feelings, I am ashamed that I could be so close-minded, and well, snobby. I think one of the inmates put it best when he said in his persuasion speech, "there is good and bad centered in each of us." Nothing could be more true. That is what I learned from this experience. (Gerding, 1997)

From student papers and informal discussions, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, student volunteers changed their perceptions of prisoners through interpersonal interaction with them. They began to see beyond the crimes that were committed, and to focus more on the person inside. These changing perceptions helped eliminate the stereotypes that existed about prisoners before they entered prison. Second, students addressed the educational value of sharing their knowledge with others. By committing their time and
expertise, students experienced the value of serving community needs. Third, students recognized the severe communication deficiencies held by the inmates. Many had difficulty organizing their thoughts, articulating clearly, and using appropriate nonverbal gestures. However, a few hours with each inmate helped alleviate these deficiencies. Due to an astounding willingness to work and to develop their previously untapped potential, inmates improved dramatically during each workshop.

We also received written responses from officials at the Ionia Temporary Correctional Facility. These responses came throughout the program as well as after its conclusion. The Deputy Warden and the Athletic Director, with whom we worked closely, each commented on how much inmates enjoyed the program and how they believed the skills being learned by inmates were going to help them upon release. One letter written by ITCF officials indicated that participation in the program "made a difference" after one prisoner's release. We learned that an inmate who did a persuasive speech on child abuse continued to spread his message throughout the community. We expect more written accounts as more inmates are released from prison and enter society.

The strongest evidence of the program's worth came directly from the prisoners. Excitement among inmates after the tournament was evident. Fortunately, their excitement was not simply a temporary adrenaline rush. The inmates have shown a commitment to continuing the program through the development of the ITCF Rhetoricians' Society. On their own, prisoners developed by-laws for their new organization, an organizational purpose, membership requirements, officers, voting procedures, and consequences for ignoring the group's rules. In so doing, the prisoners created their own speech and debate club. Currently, the by-laws for the speech and debate club are under review by prison officials and have yet to be approved.

As Preston and Jensen (1995) assert, community service programs will bring positive publicity to a forensic program. This particular service learning project was covered by our school
newspaper, the community newspaper, and even the British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC]. In addition, the forensic team received an award from the Office of Student Life at Central Michigan University for outstanding community service. Never before had the Central Michigan forensics team received so much coverage and praise.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SIMILAR PROGRAMS**

First, volunteers should ask for an orientation session from prison officials before entering the facility and interacting with inmates, for one must observe a variety of rules related to volunteer status and interaction. A formal orientation program should be expected so that no one is uncertain about what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior inside the prison. We have begun a similar program at the Saginaw Correctional Facility in Freeland, Michigan. Before entrance into the prison, we received a detailed orientation from the prison chaplain and the assistant deputy warden. Included in the orientation were materials regarding volunteer status and a volunteer contract. Orientation programs help college students assimilate into a culture most have never entered. All students have visions of prison life through its depiction on television, yet they are often ill-prepared for the varied emotions they will experience when entering the bleak, depressing home of some of our nation's most violent men.

Second, volunteers should go by their first names only. Disclosing one's last name to a convicted criminal could be potentially dangerous for two reasons: greater amounts of disclosure can lead to the perception of friendship, and prison volunteers are not allowed to be a friend or relative of a prisoner within the facility. As soon as prisoners perceive a volunteer as a friend, they may try to contact that individual, which is a violation of the volunteer relationship. Prisoners have committed crimes and may later participate in criminal behavior after release. Providing last names makes obtaining information about volunteers quite easy.
Everything must be done to prevent students from becoming victims of any criminal activity. This means limiting information about them as much as possible. It may seem impersonal, but this particular service learning project demands that participants adopt a "better safe than sorry" philosophy.

Third, a quantitative assessment should be taken. Because ours was an experimental, preliminary service-learning project, rigorous, quantitative methods of analysis were not used. The development and execution of the project was quite time consuming. However, the positive reactions are a sign that we should accumulate some quantitative data. This quantitative data could take two forms. First, researchers could do pre-tests and post-tests to see if communication traits, such as apprehension, aggressiveness, argumentativeness, and dogmatism are influenced by participation in the program. Second, the recidivism rates of participants in the program can be tracked. Recidivism rates are frequently tracked in relation to other variables, such as participation in athletic programs. The social value of this service-learning program can be evaluated by tracking the percentage of program participants who return to prison. To facilitate such analysis, records must be maintained by the prison, as well as by researchers.

Fourth, the number of events offered to inmates should be expanded. We began by offering poetry, persuasion, and Lincoln-Douglas debate. This year, we will be offering prose interpretation as well. However, offering only four events may be an inefficient way to teach each skill. But, unfortunately, a volunteer group's ability to offer numerous events is dependent upon the resources available to them.

Fifth, technology should be harnessed to allow for inter-facility competitions and distance learning. Teleconferencing systems are available, which may allow one facility's team to compete directly against another facility's team, in either debate or individual events. Even without teleconferencing systems, videotapes can be used to record performances and evaluate them to establish comparisons between competitors at different facilities. In
February of 1998, we videotaped performances at each of the facilities we served. At our annual individual events tournament, we critiqued them, ranked them, and offered sweepstakes points based on those ranks. Scores were calculated and awards were determined. Offering an inter-facility tournament encourages inmates to support each other through teamwork. The more advanced the technology, the greater the capacity for inter-facility competition. In addition, the use of teleconferencing can make reaching inmate populations less time consuming, less expensive, and less dangerous. Establishing conference networks would allow one initial presentation to be aired to numerous facilities. Instead of traveling to independent facilities, which takes time and money, conferencing systems would make it possible to reach more prisoners without leaving the premises of the university. Security is very tight in prisons, yet any contact with an inmate poses a potential risk for the volunteer. A volunteer will be safer with less interpersonal contact.

Unfortunately, money is limited, and most forensic budgets cannot support an exponential expansion for such a service-learning project. Coaches and teams should write grant proposals so that service-learning programs can become a reality.

CONCLUSION

This paper described and evaluated a valuable service-learning project implemented by the Central Michigan University Debate and Forensic Team. As free citizens, we often make the mistake of ignoring the lives of prisoners. Because almost every prisoner will eventually be released into our communities, we should not ignore persons who live behind prison walls. Offering service-learning programs that empower inmates to live in a democratic society are valuable and worthwhile. But correctional facilities cannot do it alone, and they need the help of a concerned forensic community that is willing to serve and learn through the expertise that coaches and teams have to offer.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A

CMU Speech and Debate Workshop
Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Persuasion, and Poetry Interpretation
Thursday, November 14, 1996

Tentative Itinerary

3:15 p.m.  Depart for Ionia Temporary Correctional Facility
5:15 p.m.  Arrive for Processing
5:30 p.m.  Introductions, Overview of the Workshop.
5:45 p.m.  Lecture:
            A.  Stock issues for a proposition of policy
            B.  Developing a prima facie case
6:30 p.m.  Exhibition Debate
7:00 p.m.  Discussion of the Debate
7:30 p.m.  Persuasion
            A.  Explanation
            B.  Demonstration
            C.  Discussion
8:00 p.m.  Poetry Interpretation
            A.  Explanation
            B.  Demonstration
            C.  Discussion
8:30 p.m.  Depart for CMU