

# **UNDERSTANDING WHY INMATES ARE MISCLASSIFIED**

## **THE USE OF QUALITATIVE METHODS IN EVALUATING OBJECTIVE PRISON CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS**

Prepared by

Jack Alexander, Ph.D.

and

James Austin, Ph.D.

National Council On Crime And Delinquency  
685 Market Street, Suite 620  
San Francisco, CA 94105

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

The past decade has witnessed considerable progress in the design and implementation of objective prison classification systems (OPCS). Although most states have adopted these classification systems, there has been little evaluation of their effects on prison operations, inmate and staff safety, and the planning capabilities of correctional systems. The few studies that have been completed suggest that OPCSs improve consistency in classification decision-making, decrease wasteful overclassification and reduce rates of serious misconduct and escape. There are also indications that classification has had positive effects on a prison system's ability - to better plan its future prison bed and staff resource needs (Alexander and Austin, 1993 :4-5).

Despite these early positive results, further evaluations of OPCSs that utilize both qualitative and quantitative research methods are needed to develop a larger and more rigorous body of knowledge regarding prison classification. In particular, we need to learn more about how OPCSs function on a day to day basis (process studies) and why it is that some inmates fail to behave as expected or as classified (validation).

The purposes of this study were twofold. First, we wanted to test new methods for evaluating objective prison classification systems. To date, most classification studies have relied exclusively upon quantitative research methods. While these studies have proven to be valuable, they assume the integrity of the process of collecting and analyzing classification data. Furthermore, there are many "subjective" factors that enter into the classification decision-making process. The seemingly direct process of tallying the inmate's number of prior felony convictions is not always straightforward. Also, there is the always difficult task of determining when an over-ride should be utilized.

Second, we wanted to investigate why it is that inmates who are classified for a certain custody level do not behave as expected. For example, why is it that large proportions of inmates classified for maximum custody behave and, conversely, why do inmates in minimum custody misbehave? In particular, how do environmental factors related to prison management interact with an inmate's behavior?

For these reasons we conducted a classification study that relied largely upon qualitative research methods of interviewing staff and inmates and observing the classification system in operation. By getting "closer" to the classification system's operations we found we were able to learn far more about its strengths and limitations.

The two prison systems selected for the study were Pennsylvania and Nevada. Both states had successfully implemented OPCSs that were modelled after the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) prison classification system, were well supported by professional classification staff and were fully automated. They volunteered for the study because both departments were interested in learning more about their systems and how they could be improved - an objective

that all too often is missing in many agencies.

This executive summary presents the major findings that emanated from the research. These findings show that the OPCSs studied here are, by and large, excellent systems that are functioning quite well and are achieving their major goals. However, there are weaknesses that need to be corrected to further improve these systems. More importantly, these and other OPCSs need to be routinely evaluated on a more detailed level to better monitor classification activities and assess their overall effectiveness. A more detailed accounting of the research methods, findings and recommendations can be found in the main body of the report.

## PROCESS EVALUATION RESULTS - HOW WELL ARE THE SYSTEMS WORKING?

The process evaluation consisted of an audit of the OPCS to determine whether the systems were functioning as designed. Both systems were assessed along 18 dimensions or standards that we believe should be applied to any OPCS. The major findings from this analysis were as follows:

- An adequate number of professional staff are trained and assigned to classification activities;
- The central office classification unit governs all inter-facility transfers, thus ensuring a high degree of compliance with administrative classification goals and objectives;
- The classification forms are relatively easy to use and complete;
- High accuracy rates were reported for both the initial and reclassification instruments;
- High rates of reliability were reported for the scoring of the two instruments;
- Parole violators who return for technical violations should be classified according to the reclassification instrument - not the initial classification instrument;
- On-going training is needed for classification staff in the interpretation of the classification instruments and the data provided by various source documents;
- Inmates were not always informed of their classification scores or, more importantly, the basis for these scores; and
- Both states need an on-going process or audit capability to better monitor the OPCS.

## **VALIDATION RESULTS - WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE INMATE BEHAVIOR?**

The second phase of research focused on the general topic of validation. Namely, how well do the OPCs assign inmates according to their risk to commit serious crimes or violations of institutional rules while incarcerated? But we were not interested in simply doing a statistical analysis as is often the case with validation studies. Rather we wanted to examine why it is that inmates who are expected to behave or misbehave don't.

To address this topic we sampled a small set of cases that fit these categories. Our findings are as follows:

### **Inmates classified for high. custody who did not become involved in serious misconducts:**

- Classification criteria and policies that restrict inmates convicted of violent crimes or lengthy prison terms result in a substantial number of inmates who pose little threat of institutional violence or escape being over-classified and housed in high security facilities.
- Related to the first point, there is a growing number of inmates who are well-behaved and pose little risk to prison or public safety but who cannot be placed in a lower custody level because of the nature of their crimes. While it may not be politically feasible to assign these inmates to community-based facilities, there is a growing need for correctional agencies to begin planning for housing units and perhaps entire facilities for long-term and older inmates who require minimal internal security and medium external security (e.g., fences, remote locations, etc.).
- The physical attributes of high security units themselves serve to suppress an inmate's opportunity to become involved in serious misconduct.
- Most high custody inmates simply do not become involved in serious misconduct (low base rate) for a variety of reasons resulting in a significant amount of over-classification. For this reason it is critical that prison systems constantly monitor their classification policies - especially their reclassification criteria and restrictions for placing inmates convicted of certain crimes in minimum or community custody settings.
- Even though a significant proportion of high custody inmates do not become involved in serious misconduct, they do as a group have a much higher infraction rate than inmates housed in lower custody. This finding suggests that the classification system in tandem with the prison environment is working, albeit not perfectly, to classify inmates according to risk.

### **Inmates classified in low custody but becoming involved in serious misconducts:**

- a** There were no systematic differences observed between those inmates who behaved and those who did not. Consequently, attempting to predict what appears to be an often random process is highly impractical.
- a** Staff can play a very important role in suppressing or preventing serious incidents from occurring by being more pro-active in their interactions with inmates. Too frequently, staff simply let a “situation” unfold between two inmates rather than intervening to control the situation before it gets out of hand.
- a** The physical attributes of low security units themselves significantly increase an inmate’s opportunity to become involved in serious misconduct;
- The instruments themselves need to be adjusted to better meet the expectations of staff and inmates regarding inmate misconduct that occurs in a low security facility. In one state, the weight assigned to inmate assaults (fighting) is so high that it almost always results in a transfer to maximum security which staff believe is too excessive.
- a** Low custody inmates have much lower infraction rates suggesting that the classification system in tandem with the prison environment is working to properly classify inmates according to risk.

We believe this modest evaluation has illustrated the value of qualitative methods for better understanding how an objective prison classification system functions within a prison system and those complex personal and environmental forces that influence an inmate’s behavior. Although there were several weaknesses in the classification system, the research also validated the . overall soundness of the system in terms of classifying inmates according to each Department’s formal policies and procedures.

## INTRODUCTION

### Project Background and Goals

The past decade has witnessed considerable progress in the design and implementation of objective prison classification systems (OPCS). To date most state prison systems have adopted such systems. Despite the proliferation of these classification systems, there has been little evaluation of their effects on prison operations, inmate and staff safety, and the planning capabilities of correctional systems. The few studies that have been completed suggest that OPCSs improve consistency in classification decision-making, decrease overclassification and reduce rates of serious misconduct and escape. There are also indications that classification has had positive effects on the prison system's ability to better plan its future prison bed and staff resource needs (Alexander and Austin, 1993 :4-5).

In the recently published *Handbook for Evaluation Objective Prison Classification Systems* (Alexander and Austin, 1992) we wrote that further evaluation of objective prison classification systems is urgently needed. We further argued that both qualitative and quantitative methods should be used to produce balanced evaluations. Unfortunately, almost all published studies of prison classification systems have relied exclusively upon quantitative methods.

In an effort to correct this situation, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) awarded a grant to the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) to test qualitative research methods that can be applied to evaluations of OPCS. The goals of this grant were:

1. Develop and test qualitative methods to perform process evaluations of OPCS.
2. Develop and test qualitative methods to identify the factors that explain why some inmates classified as maximum/close fail to become management problems, and why some who are classified minimum do become management problems.
3. Demonstrate that qualitative methods can be used to achieve reliable and valid evaluation findings that complement the findings of quantitative methods.
4. Demonstrate that with some training prison staff can themselves use qualitative methods to produce reliable and valid evaluations.

Two prison systems were selected to participate in the project; Pennsylvania and Nevada. As of 1992 Pennsylvania had an inmate population of approximately 25,000 inmates and an incarceration rate of 204 per 100,000. Nevada had a much smaller inmate population of 6,050, and a much higher incarceration rate of 461 per 100,000 (the national average for 1992 was 329 per 100,000) (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1993).

Both of these states have implemented OPCSs that are modelled on the National Institute of Corrections prison classification system. Nevada's was implemented in 1982 and has



undergone one major evaluation that produced some minor modifications to the system. Pennsylvania originally implemented an OPCS that was developed by the Correctional Services Group. In 1991 the Pennsylvania DOC decided to replace that system with one based on the NIC additive scale. That system was implemented in the spring of 1992.

## Conceptual Approach

### Types of Evaluation

For prison officials the most pressing evaluation issue is whether the OPCS is doing a good job in determining those inmates who require either higher or lower levels of supervision and security. When inmates who were classified as minimum or low custody, become involved in serious misconduct, is it because the classification system is incorrect, an error was made by staff in applying the classification system, or did other factors precipitate the incident? The same issue applies to inmates who have been classified as maximum/close custody but fail to misbehave as expected.

To address these issues, the following two fundamental questions that relate to the predictive attributes (validity) and successful implementation (process evaluation) of the OPCS must be asked and answered:

1. How accurately does the OPCS identify inmates risk (validity)?
2. How well has the OPCS been implemented (process)?

Related to the question of validity, is the issue how factors external to classification, such as overcrowding, security staffing, facility design, and administrative policies also influence inmate misconduct? The two types of research designs, validation and process, which are used to answer these research questions, are discussed at length below.

### Validation Study

A validation study seeks to determine the degree to which a classification instrument succeeds in predicting what it claims to predict, should be structured by theory. Theories should be used to guide the design of validation studies for two reasons. First, a theory is based on the accumulated knowledge and analysis of researchers in the field. There is no point in ignoring that progress and proceeding as though nothing has been learned. Second, a theory specifies the factors involved in a social process and their interactions. Whether the factors and interactions specified are correct or not, the theory focusses the evaluation.

Theories we use should have promise for explaining the facts of prison disciplinary adjustment that we do know. We know that most inmates adjust acceptably to prison, and we know that a few inmates generate most of the disciplinary problems. According to published studies, a few characteristics of individuals are predictors of disciplinary adjustment such as sex,

age, and marital status (Chapman and Alexander, 1991). We also know that while the relationship between these predictors and disciplinary problems appears consistently in many reports, the relationship is weak and not always consistent. For example, though young inmates create more disciplinary problems than older inmates, the difference is small (Chapman and Alexander, 1981). We also have some evidence to show that disciplinary adjustment varies over an inmate's term; disciplinary problems tend to be frequent at first while inmates adjust to prison and then decline (Tech and Adams, 1989). Finally, we know that the formal disciplinary record of an inmate is more than a simple record of these acts. It reflects a complex and subtle interaction between the inmate and staff and other inmates (Lombardo, 1981).

Over the last fifty years the level of prison disruption in general and violence in particular has risen (Hawkins and Alpert, 1989:240-41). The prisons of fifty years ago appear as closed worlds in which there was a relatively stable balance of power between prison staff and inmates. This balance of power rested on a relatively stable inmate social structure. The prisons of today appear more open to outside influences (especially courts) and are more in turmoil due to crowding and rapid population increases. More so than ever, inmates are divided into groups based on race that compete for control of prison resources (Irwin, 1980).

Two models or theories have dominated the attempts to explain the facts of prison social life. One is the deprivation model and the other is the importation model. The first asserts that an inmate subculture evolves in response to the environment such as isolation, reduced freedom of choice and close surveillance. The second asserts that inmate behavior is a continuation of roles they have developed outside prison, particularly their criminal and racial roles. This latter perspective is often used to explain the rise of prison gangs which have contributed to the increase of prison violence.

The two models have always been less contradictory than they appeared. For instance, in the deprivation model inmates are recruited to the roles of prison subculture on the basis of characteristics they bring from the street. For example, the "Square John" role tended to be filled by inmates who were first-time offenders, "Right Guys" tended to be low-level committed criminals, "Con Politicians" tended to be sophisticated criminals, and "Outlaws" tended to have committed bizarre crimes (Schrag, 196 1: 348).

In recent years researchers have turned from attempting to determine which model was right and which wrong, to understanding prison behavior as the result of an interaction between the two models. In this view the social structure of prison is an outcome of the characteristics inmates bring with them to prison and the special conditions they encounter there.

It is evident that the combination of the deprivation and importation models is more consistent with the facts than either model alone. The fact that certain inmate characteristics are consistent predictors of disciplinary problems suggest that adaptation to the prison environment cannot be the complete explanation (unless inmates with the characteristics in question are always placed in the same environments). Furthermore, since inmate disciplinary

rates also vary across facilities that have similar inmate populations suggests that the importation model alone is an insufficient explanation of inmate behavior..

In both of these states, efforts were made to design the classification scoring criteria according to their ability to predict which inmates are high and low risk relative to serious inmate misconduct based on the inmate's characteristics. However, even if one were to assume that individual attributes are the primary predictors of behavior, it must also be noted that several scoring criteria that have no predictive capabilities are included for management and departmental policy purposes. For example, severity of the current offense or time till release are examples of scoring items that contribute heavily to an inmate's custody level but were found to have a minimal or non-existent relationship to inmate misconduct. These items are used for classification because they reflect departmental policies of placing inmates convicted of violent crimes and/or long prison terms in high security prisons for the initial portion of their incarceration. But by including these non-predictive items, the classification instrument becomes less valid.

For these reasons, its important to explore other factors, especially environmental forces that are external to the inmate but exert considerable influence on institutional conduct. Such factors can range from peer pressures or relations among inmates and staff, staff training and deployment, agency administrative policies and procedures, and the architecture of the facility.

#### Process Evaluation

A process evaluation determines the degree to which a program is implemented as intended. It should be structured by the description of the program as it is intended to operate. In many ways, a process evaluation actually represents how an agency should conduct periodic audits of its OPCS.

In conducting the process evaluations for both states, we developed a list of topics one should address in evaluating an OPCS. These topics are based on national standards and our collective experiences with OPCSs in many states. The following research questions were then adapted to the specifics of each state.

1. Is there a Department classification mission statement and a list of classification objectives?
2. Is there an annual review of Department classification policies and procedures?
3. Are inmate classification schedules for completing initial and reclassification reviews adhered to?
4. Is classification based on information that is complete, accurate, timely?
5. Are the classification decisions made in a reliable and consistent manner?

6. Are classification override rates between 5 and 20 percent?
7. Are the reasons used for over-rides appropriate?
8. Is there adequate identification of special needs (substance abuse, mental illness, developmental disability, vulnerability, high risk)?
9. Are inmates housed according to their classification custody levels?
10. Where an inmate's classification custody and housing placement are inconsistent, is there justification for the difference?
11. Are classification forms user-friendly?
12. Are the instructions for completing forms and making a custody and housing decision clear and comprehensive?
13. Are classification staff qualifications commensurate with their responsibilities?
14. Do staff receive the necessary training to perform their duties?
15. Are the organizational resources for supporting the classification system adequate?
  - a. number of staff
  - b. physical plant
  - c. office equipment
  - d. automation
16. Is there adequate involvement of the inmate in his/her classification?
  - a. orientation
  - b. participation in classification hearing
  - c. notification of classification decision and rationale
  - d. appeal mechanism
17. Is the objective prison classification system efficient?
18. Are there regular monitoring mechanisms to enable supervisors and managers assess whether classification policies and procedures are actually being carried out?

Assuming an agency successfully addresses each of these operational issues, one should expect to observe positive results on a number of dimensions such as inmate misconduct rates, staff morale, and expenditures.

## Qualitative Research Methods for Process and Validation Studies

Qualitative and quantitative methods differ in two respects. First, quantitative methods collect information by assigning numbers to phenomena, while qualitative methods collect information by assigning narrative to phenomena. Second, in quantitative methods the assignment of numbers to phenomena is highly structured; in qualitative methods the assignment of narrative to phenomena is loosely structured. From these two differences between qualitative and quantitative methods arise the relative advantages and disadvantages between them.

Quantitative methods produce reliable information in the sense that no matter which researcher collects the information, they all collect the same information about the same phenomena. However, the operational definitions that give quantitative methods their precision and objectivity also predetermine how social phenomena will be observed. Quantitative methods can efficiently produce information about many cases and can efficiently compare these cases.

Qualitative methods, which do not use these operational definitions, are more open to discovering the unanticipated factors that explain human and organizational behavior. By the same token qualitative methods collect less reliable information, as each researcher puts his or her unique perspective and skills to the task of data collection. In particular qualitative methods make use of the researcher's capacity to empathize with those (s)he studies.

To give an example related to prison classification, we may wish to measure a classification officer's attitudes towards the classification process. We can do this by conducting a quantitative survey of all classification officers. In a large prison system, this effort could entail surveying several hundred officers. Qualitative data could be collected via a longer open-ended interview process or by observing staff and inmates interact in a number of key settings (e.g., cell blocks, work assignment). However, because qualitative methods are more time consuming, it may not be possible to observe or interview all of the officers thus requiring some kind of a sampling strategy.

The advantage of the structured questionnaire is that we can easily count and rank the answers. For instance, we administer a questionnaire to a large number of staff which includes the following question:

“What has been the impact of the objective prison classification system on your relations with inmates: 1) improved, 2) no change, 3) worsened?”

The responses can be compared directly and quickly identify statistical relationships such as that relationships are improved for male staff but worsened for females. However, a disadvantage of the quantitative method is that we have no rigorous idea of what the answers we are comparing mean in the first place. One counselor may consider a relation with less trouble to be an improvement, another may consider a relation with more accountability to be an improvement. One counselor might score a slight improvement a “1”; another counselor might

score it a “2”; what one counselor considers a slight improvement, another counselor might consider a major improvement.

Qualitative methods enable us to investigate the meaning of informants’ answers by allowing the researcher to capture the staff person’s meanings of “improved staff relations.” In an open-ended format, the staff person can be probed by the researcher to search for examples of what the person means by his/her responses. More importantly, the researcher can also observe the interactions of staff and inmates over a considerable period of the time to further document the nature of staff/inmate relations. The fact that qualitative methods are not highly structured does not mean that evaluators can wander onto the scene, collect some “war” stories and impressions and call their work evaluation. Considerable skill is required to collect and interpret a wide array of data about each inmate.

In this evaluation we used four qualitative data collection methods; individual interviews, group interviews, case studies, and observations of the classification decision-making process. We held interviews with classification staff, classification supervisors, security staff and inmates. The case studies were a combination of file reviews and individual and group interviews. Finally, we observed classification officers conducting interviews with inmates and completing classification forms to better understand the issues they must face in making custody and housing decisions.

For the individual interviews interview schedules which consisted of a sequence of open-ended questions were developed. They served three purposes. One was to assure that all the topics to be covered in an interview are in fact systematically covered. A second purpose was to state questions clearly and neutrally. It was all too easy to phrase questions in a loaded way. For instance, to ask “What problems do you have with other inmates?” was to assume that the subject has problems with other inmates. A better question would have been “Have you had problems with other inmates?” However, given the tendency of inmates to present themselves as persons in control of their relation to the environment, another useful way to put the question was: “What problems, if any, do you have with other inmates?” The third purpose was to arrange the sequence of topics so the subject was most likely to give accurate and complete information.

To better illustrate how the interview was structured and used, the following paragraphs outline how one interview was carried out. This particular interview was used to examine inmates who were placed in minimum custody but who subsequently committed a serious rule violation. This interview was part of the case studies (see Appendix A). The purpose of the case studies was to evaluate how well the OPCS is predicting inmate behavior. The place of the true positive inmate interview was to find out the process of adjustment from the point of view of the inmate and to explore from the point of view of the inmate the relation between standard predictors and disciplinary adjustment.

The first interview topic was the inmate’s transfer history. This can be a fairly neutral topic that the subject can usually negotiate successfully, which gives him/her a sense of

confidence. The inmate also has a chance to size up the interviewer in a preliminary way. The topic also immediately orients the subject to the main topic of the interview - the inmate's prison history. Finally, while the inmate's transfer history is in itself a sequence of neutral facts, it may easily rouse the subjects' own thoughts and feelings, which gives the interviewer a chance to welcome them into the interview.

The interview then moved to the specific incident(s) that constituted the poor adjustment. By focussing on specific events, the inmate was encouraged to relive and express his/her own experience. The schedule left to the end of this topic the more general questions - why these events occurred and how the events could have been prevented. In this way we encouraged the subject to base his general observations on his specific experiences.

The interview also included the inmate's prison adjustment history. We have also collected the inmates' official disciplinary record, so the inmate's and official version could be compared. For many of the other topics we have also collected information from the inmate's official records. Where the inmate and the official versions agree, we have more confidence in each. If the versions disagree, we do not assume that one version is right and the other wrong, but that there are problems of accuracy to explore.

Having started by dwelling on recent and vivid events we hoped to encourage the inmate to reconstruct past events. By asking the inmate about his history of problems with inmates and staff in prison we also collected his/her own definition of what could have been done to have prevented the situation from occurring. These questions sometimes needed to be rephrased, since sometimes inmates presented themselves as persons who are in control of all situations. The interview then focused on environmental factors that were thought to relate to adjustment: other inmates, the officers, the physical layout of the prison and prison practices. The interview then focused on inmate variables that were thought to relate to inmate adjustment: criminal record, family, employment, education and religious history and prison program participation.

## **PROCESS EVALUATION RESULTS - HOW WELL IS THE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM WORKING?**

### **THE PENNSYLVANIA PROCESS STUDY**

#### **Introduction**

The process evaluation was based on data collected during a field visit from December 12 through December 17, 1992. Four units reflecting various levels of security and departmental functions were visited:

Central Office  
Reception Center - Camp Hill

Maximum Security Prison - Graterford C .F.  
Minimum Security Prison - Waymart C.F.

At each facility, six inmates (or a total of 18) were interviewed. Table 1 shows characteristics of these inmates. The sample of six was selected at each facility from a list of inmates who had been classified with the PACT (At the time of the visit approximately 4,300 of the 25,000 inmates in the Department had been classified by the PACT). The inmates were selected to represent differences in age, race, crime, time to serve and custody level.

Two counselors were interviewed at Camp Hill and three each at Graterford and Waymart. One counseling supervisor was interviewed at each prison. Appendix A provides the interview schedules that were used for. all interviews.

At each facility a reliability study was conducted. Several cases from the inmate sample were selected to represent various inmate characteristics; their folders were organized to simulate an actual classification and all folders were classified by several counselors. Counselors agreed that the conditions of the study were reasonably close to actual classification. Differences in scoring were then discussed. Central office classification staff participated in the interviewing and reliability studies at Graterford and Waymart.

### **Process Evaluation Findings**

1. Is there a Department classification mission statement and a list of classification objectives?

Policy Statement # 11.3.1, Pennsylvania Additive Classification Tool (PACT) states the Department's objectives for the PACT.

- a. The PACT drives "heads, beds and budgets."
- b. Classification should be objective and behavior driven.
- c. Decision-making is to be centralized, monitored and controlled.
- d. The custody level of the inmates should match the security level of his/her housing.
- e. Overclassification shall be reduced.

Recommendations: none.

2. Is there an annual review of Department classification policies and procedures?



**TABLE 1**  
**CHARACTERISTICS OF INMATES INTERVIEWED**  
**PENNSYLVANIA**

Age . . . . .	29 yrs
Marital Status	
Ever-Married . . . . .	7
Never Married . . . . .	11
Race	
Black . . . . .	11
Hispanic . . . . .	3
White . . . . .	4
Instant Offense	
Property . . . . .	3
Violent . . . . .	11
Drug . . . . .	4
Custody Level (without override)	
2 . . . . .	5
3 . . . . .	8
4 . . . . .	3
Age	
20 or less . . . . .	1
21-30 . . . . .	8
31-40 . . . . .	7
41 or more . . . . .	2
Time to Serve	
12 mos or less . . . . .	8
13-24 mos . . . . .	4
25-36 mos . . . . .	2
37 mos or more . . . . .	3

Department policies and procedures do not establish a regular, annual review of the PACT. \*

Recommendations: Policy and procedure should require an annual review.

3. Are inmate classification schedules for completing initial and reclassification reviews adhered to?

Policies and procedures require an inmate classification based on a PACT as follows:

Initial Classification - normally within 20 days of reception

Reclassification - Completed at least annually for all inmates and at other times sooner as specified in the policies and procedures manual.

Recommendations: Compliance with these schedules should be evaluated by a quantitative analysis based on the automated system. Where non-compliance is identified, staff should review a sample of randomly selected cases that have not met the prescribed time frames. Then interviews with staff and inmates can explore problems identified in the quantitative analysis. At the time of the field visit the PACT had only been in effect for two months, so that analysis of sample cases would be unproductive.

4. Is classification based on information that is complete, accurate, timely?

The PACT requires several types of information to complete a classification. Listed below are the types of information needed for both the initial and reclassification systems that may be problematic in terms of producing accurate information.

Initial Classification

- a. Criminal history

There are four sources of information:

- Pre-Sentence Report (P-SR)
- Rap Sheet
- Commitment
- Inmate self-report

The commitment paper almost always provides adequate information on the current offense. The most serious other offense, escape history and number of prior commitments are another matter. In some cases the P-SR

and the rap sheet are available; in most cases the P-SR or the rap sheet but not both are available, and in some cases neither are available, so that classification is based entirely on inmate self-report. Furthermore, both the P-SR and the rap often list arrests without clear dispositions.

Classifying inmates on the basis of self-reports alone is unsatisfactory. There have been numerous studies of the accuracy of inmate criminal record self-report. In general the accuracy of inmates in recalling their criminal histories is about the same as the accuracy of the general public in recalling its history. However, the general public is quite inaccurate. Moreover, inmates have a strong motive to conceal and distort aspects of their criminal histories. The correlations between inmate self-reports and official reports of criminal behavior range from .3 to .8 (Weiss, 3-14). That is much too low for the purposes of classification. In addition, accuracy varies among sub-populations. Accuracy is lower for serious, chronic offenders (Weiss, 28).

b. Prior Institutional Adjustment

Information on adjustment to jail prior to admission is frequently missing.

c. Time to Expected Release

This variable is generally accurate.

d. Age

No accuracy problems to be reported.

e. Marital Status

This variable is generally self-reported by the inmate and is of questionable accuracy.

f. Employment History

This variable is generally self-reported by the inmate and is of questionable accuracy.

### Reclassification

a. Disciplinary Adjustment

No accuracy problems to be reported.

b. Program Participation

No accuracy problems to be reported.

c. Work Performance

No accuracy problems to be reported.

d. Housing Performance

Current work, housing and program evaluations are sometimes unavailable. The values on these forms are not consistent with the scores in the PACT which makes the information difficult to translate into PACT scores.

Recommendations: It should be a very high priority for the Department to get RAP sheets on all inmates prior to classification. Most inmates stay in Reception long enough for the RAPs to be obtained. Classifying any inmate without an official criminal history is unsatisfactory.

5. Are classification decisions made in a reliable and consistent manner?

Tables 2 - 6 show the results of the reliability study for the initial and reclassification instruments for each facility as well as for all of the facilities combined.

For all items on the custody initial classification instrument the reliability rate is 93 and for the reclassification instrument it is 88. The reliability rate for the final decision is 100 for each instrument. Thus, all counselors agree on all cases when it comes to the final decision.

The reliability rates for the two final decisions can be 100 while the rates of the component items are less than 100 because the range for each level in the final decision is large (Minimum 1-13, Medium 14-22, Close 24-49).

The reliability rates are about the same for the three prisons and for the two instruments. The rates do vary considerably by individual items. If the Department addressed the low rates for four items (Initial #4, Reclass #4, 8b, 8c) the overall Rate would rise significantly. Custody Initial Item #4, "Prior Institutional Adjustment" deserves special attention. The difference on Item #4 between "Satisfactory" and "Marginal" is four points, which can have a significant impact on the final decision.

TABLE 2

## PENNSYLVANIA RELIABILITY STUDY

## INITIAL INMATE CLASSIFICATION

Camp Hill C.F.

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Totals	Reliability Rate
# of Scorers	4	4	4	4	16	
Custody	Number of Disagreements					
1	0	0	0	0	0	100
2	0	0	1	0	1	94
3	0	0	0	0	0	100
4	1	3	1	1	6	63
5	2	0	1	0	3	81
6	0	0	1	0	1	94
7a	0	0	0	0	0	100
7b	0	0	0	0	0	100
7c	0	0	0	0	0	100
Override	0	1	0	1	2	88
Decision	0	0	0	0	0	100
Totals	3	4	4	2	13	93
Needs						
1	0	1	0	1	2	88
2	0	0	0	0	0	100
3	2	2	2	1	7	57
4	0	1	0	0	1	94
5	1	2	2	0	5	69
6	0	0	0	0	0	100
7	2	2	1	2	7	57
Totals	5	8	5	4	22	80

**TABLE 3**

**PENNSYLVANIA RELIABILITY STUDY  
INMATE RECLASSIFICATION  
Graterford C.F.**

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Totals	Reliability Rate
# of Scorers	3	3	3	3	12	
Custody	Number of Disagreements					
1	0	0	0	0	0	100
2	0	0	1	1	2	83
3	0	0	1	0	1	92
4	1	1	1	0	3	75
5	1	0	0	0	1	92
6	0	0	0	0	0	100
7	0	0	0	0	0	100
8a	0	0	0	1	1	92
8b	1	1	1	1	4	67
8c	1	1	0	0	2	83
Override	1	0	0	1	2	83
Decision	0	0	0	0	0	100
Totals	5	3	4	4	16	89
Needs						
1	0	0	0	0	0	100
2	0	0	0	0	0	100
3	3	1	0	1	5	59
4	1	1	1	1	4	67
5	1	1	1	3	6	50
6	0	0	0	0	0	100
7	0	0	0	0	0	100
Totals	5	3	2	5	15	81

**TABLE 4**

**PENNSYLVANIA RELIABILITY STUDY  
INMATE RECLASSIFICATION  
Waymart C.F.**

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Totals	Reliability Rate
# of Scorers	<b>4</b>	4	4	4	16	
Custody	Number of Disagreements					
1	<b>1</b>	0	0	0	1	94
2	<b>1</b>	0	0	1	2	88
3	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	100
4	<b>0</b>	1	1	2	4	75
5	1	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	1	2	88
6	0	0	0	0	0	100
7	0	0	0	0	0	100
8a	0	0	1	1	2	88
8b	1	0	2	2	5	69
8c	1	1	2	2	6	63
Override	2	1	<b>0</b>	1	4	75
Decision	0	0	0	0	0	100
Totals	7	3	6	10	26	86
Needs						
1	0	2	1	2	5	69
2	0	0	0	0	0	100
3	1	1	2	0	4	75
4	1	1	1	1	4	75
5	1	1	2	0	4	75
6	0	0	1	0	1	94
7	1	0	2	1	4	75
Totals	4	5	9	4	22	80

TABLE 5  
PENNSYLVANIA RELIABILITY STUDY  
INMATE RECLASSIFICATION

	Graterford	Waymart	Totals	Reliability Rate
# of Scorers	12	16	28	
Custody	Number of Disagreements			
1	0	1	1	96
2	2	2	4	86
3	1	0	1	96
4	3	4	7	75
5	1	2	3	89
6	0	0	0	100
7	0	0	0	100
8a	1	2	3	89
8b	4	5	9	67
8c	2	6	8	71
Override	2	4	6	78
Decision	0	0	0	100
Totals	16	26	42	88
Needs				
1	0	5	5	82
2	0	0	0	100
3	5	4	9	67
4	4	4	8	71
5	6	4	10	64
6	0	1	1	96
7	0	4	4	86
Totals	15	22	37	81



TABLE 6

PENNSYLVANIA RELIABILITY STUDY  
ALL FACILITIES, ALL ITEMS

	# of Cases Scored	# of Disagreements	Reliability Rate
Custody Scoring Items			
Init 1 & Rec 1	44	3	91
Init 2 & Rec 2	44	5	95
Initial 3	16	0	100
Initial 4	16	6	63
Initial 5	16	3	81
Initial 6	16	1	94
Ini 7a & Rec 6	44	0	100
Initial 7b	16	0	100
Initial 7c	16	0	100
Reclass 3	28	1	96
Reclass 4	28	7	75
Reclass 5	28	3	89
Reclass 7	28	0	100
Reclass 8a	28	3	89
Reclass 8b	28	9	68
Reclass 8c	28	8	71
Override	44	8	82
Decision	44	0	100
Totals	512	57	89
Needs Scoring Items			
1	44	7	84
2	44	0	100
3	44	16	64
4	44	9	80
5	44	15	64
6	44	1	98
7	44	11	75
Totals	308	59	81
Totals	820	115	86

The reliability rate for the needs assessment instrument is lower than for the custody instruments.

Again there is little difference between the prisons, and there is significant difference between individual items. If the Department addressed the low rates for Items 3, 5 and 7, the overall rate would rise significantly. Our counselor group interviews following the reliability studies identified most of the reasons for the disagreements and lower reliability rates. These reasons are discussed in Sections 4, 11 and 13.

Recommendation: The Department can increase its reliability rate by addressing seven items.

6. Are classification override rates between 5 and 20 percent?

It was not possible to calculate an over-ride rate at the time of this initial site visit.

Recommendation: The override rate should be based on discretionary, not administrative overrides.

7. Are the reasons used for over-rides appropriate?

Out of 44 cases done there were 11 overrides. Of the 11 overrides, most were automatic, a few were based on counselor judgement. (There should have been two more overrides, because in two cases incorrectly placed the inmates in the correct level without an override.)

Recommendation: none.

8. Is there adequate identification of special needs (substance abuse, mental illness, developmental disability, vulnerability, high risk)?

Pennsylvania is in the process of assigning classification levels to all beds. Until that process is completed, comparing inmate classification to inmate placement is premature.

Recommendation: none.

9. Are classification forms user-friendly?

Counselors identified the following problems:

- a. There is not enough room to enter the inmate number.

- b. In Initial and Reclass Items 1 and 2 the process of translating severity scores into weights is confusing and unnecessary.

Recommendation: Why not simply list the crimes according to their weights in Section F of the Instructions?

- c. Reclass Item 4 is confusing, which probably accounts for the lower Reliability Rate.

Recommendation: Would the following categories be better?

None during the last 18 months

None during the last 12 months

None during the last 6 months

- 10. Are the instructions for completing forms and making a custody and housing decision clear and comprehensive?

Counselors identified the following problems.

- a. Custody Initial and Reclass Item 1 - how to score out of state convictions, how to score warrants, how to score present and prior detainers, how to score offense attempts
- b. Custody Initial Item 4 - according to the Instructions, "Prior Institutional Adjustment" includes adjustment in jail prior to reception into the Department for the current commitment. Some Counselors have concluded that prior jail adjustment is to be scored; others that it isn't.
- c. Custody Initial Item 6 - how to score CPV on backtime for prior or instant offense
- d. Custody Reclass Item 8a

Some Counselors never score an inmate -3 on the grounds that substance abuse counseling must be ongoing; it is never complete. Other Counselors do score an inmate -3 if he completes the segment of substance abuse counseling agreed to at the last program review.

- e. Needs Assessment Item #3 - Counselors are very unclear as to how to score this item
- f. Counselors say they use judgmental overrides rarely and are unclear when to use it.

Recommendation: clarify instructions on the above issues.

11. Are classification staff qualifications commensurate with their responsibilities?

Three supervisors were interviewed; all had prison experience. At the Reception Center the supervisor had 21 years experience as a counselor in Classification and General Confinement. At the General Confinement facilities one supervisor had twenty years experience as a counselor and the other had four years experience as a counselor prior to becoming supervisor.

Recommendation: none.

12. Do staff receive the necessary training to perform their duties?

All staff using the new PACT system received three days training. The training was primarily on data-entry.

The coordinator and classification system analysts review PACTs and speak to staff when they identify problems. This is an excellent form of training.

Recommendation: There is a need for training on the use of judgmental overrides.

13. Are the organizational resources for supporting the classification system adequate?

- a. Staff

Caseloads ranged from 235 to 146.

- b. Physical resources

There is a severe shortage of computer terminals available to staff which slows down the classification process.

Recommendation: more computer terminals.

14. Is there adequate involvement of the inmate in his/her classification?

Inmates appear to have little interest in classification in general and their own in particular. An inmate's main interests are in what facility he is assigned to, his assignment in the facility, such as outside pass, and the level of trust his classification represents to the Parole Board.

Of 18 inmates, 10 knew their classification. The 10 inmates have a general idea of the reasons for their classification. They attribute their classification to their successful disciplinary and programmatic adjustment or lack thereof. Only one inmate said that his criminal record related to his classification.

Recommendation: Since reclassification is largely determined by an inmate's behavior, and since reclassification affects issues that are important to an inmate, it follows that the more an inmate knows his/her classification, the more (s)he will be encouraged to behave well. Therefore increased inmate involvement through more orientation and sharing of the inmate's PACT is recommended.

15. Is the objective prison classification system efficient?

Counselors reported that the PACT fits efficiently into the current work flow.

Recommendation: none.

16. Are there regular monitoring mechanisms to enable supervisors and managers assess whether classification policies and procedures are actually being carried out?

The Coordinator and Classification System Analysts review all PACTs.

In addition a daily report tracks the number of inmates classified, number of overrides and direction of overrides by facility. The report also compares the distribution of actual versus projected custody classifications.

Recommendation: As the revised PACT is implemented further monitoring reports will be needed. For instance, the Department will need to monitor the relation between inmate's classification and placement.

## **NEVADA PROCESS EVALUATION**

### **introduction**

The Nevada process evaluation was based on data collected during a five day on-site field visit (February 15 through Friday, February 19, 1993). Here again, the researchers visited three diverse facilities and the central office. The three facilities visited were:

Reception Center - Northern Nevada Correctional Center  
Medium Security Facility - NNCC  
Medium Security Facility - Nevada State Prison (NSP)  
Minimum Security Facility - Stewart Conservation Camp (SCC)

Thirty-one inmates (see Table 7), 8 Caseworkers and two supervisors were interviewed. Several classification interviews were observed.- Reliability studies of the reclassification instrument were completed at NNCC and NSP. (Since there is only one caseworker at the reception center and one at the SCC facility, a reliability study could not be done of the initial or reclassification instruments at these two facilities). Four caseworkers classified four cases at each facility. Four cases were selected at each institution from the sample of interviewed inmates. The cases were selected from those that had overrides. After doing the cases, caseworkers discussed them.

At the time of the field visit, the Department was about to implement a classification monitoring system. At the Department's request, topics to be covered by their monitoring system were left out of this evaluation and other topics were studied in greater depth.

### Process Evaluation Findings

1. Is there a Department classification mission statement and a list of classification objectives?

There is a very clear statement of Department objectives in the new AR 503.

Recommendation: none.

2. Is there an annual review of Department classification policies and procedures?

There is no formal procedure for annual review of the classification system. It should be noted that the Classification System Instrument Manual is kept quite up to date.

Recommendation: none.

3. Are inmate classification schedules for completing initial and reclassification reviews adhered to?

According to Department policy inmates should be reclassified at least every six months. All 31 inmates in our sample had been reclassified within the last six months.

Recommendation: Either get the county jail report consistently or do not use it.

4. Is classification based on information that is complete, accurate, timely?

Classification is based on the Judgement of Conviction, Pre-Sentence Report, FBI rap sheet and at initial classification the County Jail Report. In the judgement of

TABLE 7

## CHARACTERISTICS OF INMATES INTERVIEWED

## NEVADA

	Sample		Population	
	N	%	N	%
Age				
19 and less	0	0	155	3
20 - 29	13	42	2,171	34
30 - 40	10	32	2,410	38
40 and over	8	26	1,578	25
Race/Ethnic@				
Black	9	29	1,868	31
Hispanic	3	10	508	9
White	18	58	3,413	57
Other	1	3	214	4
Current Offense				
Property	9	29	1,493	24
Violent	17	55	2,906	47
Drug	4	13	1,167	19
Other	1	3	589	10
Security Level				
Minimum	7	22	1,502	27
Medium	21	68	2,869	52
Close	3	10	1,203	22

Caseworkers, the required information is available except for county jail reports, which come reliably from Clark County and unreliably from the other counties.

5. Are the classification decisions made in a reliable and consistent manner?

Out of 496 entries there were 15 entries that were identified as errors (Tables 7 and 9). That is a very high accuracy rate of 97 percent.

The reliability rate for the assigned custody level is 88 percent. The rate for all classification items is 84 percent.

Reliability problems were limited to only a few areas. By addressing these areas the Department could raise the reliability rates significantly. Of the Items, A4, BIO, C3 and D6 account for 26 of the total inconsistencies. The reasons these items generate inconsistencies are presented in the section of the report on instructions. Inconsistencies are also concentrated at NNCC (It should be noted that comparisons between facilities are of limited value. Some cases are much more difficult than others and with a very small purposive sample it is easy for one facility to have more difficult cases than the other.)

Another measure of reliability is inmates' perceptions of how consistent classification is. In our inmate sample 16 said classification is consistent, eight said it is not and seven had nothing to say on the subject. The most common reason inmates gave was that they were turned down for minimum while inmates with worse criminal histories were accepted.

Recommendations: Focus on the six items that create most of the inconsistency.

6. Are classification override rates between 5 and 20 percent?

It was not possible to calculate an over-ride rate at the time of the site visit.

Recommendation: none.

7. Are the reasons used for over-rides appropriate?

Since the Department's audit procedure will address overrides, we did not do a folder review of Classification instruments. The Caseworker at Reception noted that he overrides a lot of technical parole violators whom he classifies with an initial classification instrument. He thinks it would be better to classify these cases with the reclassification instrument. He also thinks that he overrides cases from medium to minimum when it would be better to raise the cutoff on the Initial Instrument. He also recommends reducing the cut off score level for maximum custody.



TABLE 8

## NEVADA RELIABILITY STUDY

## RECLASSIFICATION

Nevada State Prison

	Cases				Total	Reliability Rate
	1	2	3	4		
# of Scorers	4	4	4	4	16	
Sections A & B	Number of Disagreements					
1	0	0	0	0	0	100
2	0	0	0	0	0	100
3	1	1	0	0	2	88
4	0	0	2	1	3	81
5	0	0	0	1	1	94
6	0	0	0	0	0	100
7	0	0	0	0	0	100
8	0	1	0	0	1	94
9	0	0	1	0	1	94
10	0	1	2	0	3	81
Total	0	4	3	1	8	50
Section C						
1	0	0	0	1	1	94
2	0	1	0	0	1	94
3	0	0	1	0	1	94
4	0	0	0	0	0	100
5	0	0	0	0	0	100
6	0	0	0	0	0	100
7	0	0	1	0	1	94
8	0	0	0	0	0	100
9	0	0	0	0	0	100
10	0	0	1	0	1	94
Computed Cust	0	0	1	1	2	88
Section D						
1	0	0	0	0	0	100
2	0	0	0	0	0	100
3	0	0	0	0	0	100
4	0	0	0	0	0	100
5	0	0	0	0	0	100
6	1	1	1	1	4	75
7	0	0	0	0	0	100
8	0	0	0	0	0	100
Assigned Cust	1	1	1	0	3	81

**TABLE 9**  
**NEVADA RELIABILITY STUDY**

**RECLASSIFICATION**  
**Northern Nevada Correctional Center**

	Cases				Total	Reliability Rate
	1	2	3	4		
# of Scorers	4	4	4	4	16	
Sections A & B	Number of Disagreements					
1	0	0	0	0	0	100
2	0	0	0	0	0	100
3	0	1	0	0	1	94
4	1	0	2	0	3	81
5	0	1	1	0	2	88
6	0	2	1	1	4	75
7	1	0	0	0	1	94
8	2	0	0	1	3	81
9	0	0	0	0	0	100
10	1	2	0	0	3	81
Total	4	4	3	3	14	13
Section C						
1	0	0	0	0	0	100
2	0	0	0	0	0	100
3	2	1	1	0	4	75
4	0	0	1	0	1	94
5	0	0	0	0	0	100
6	1	0	1	0	2	88
7	0	0	0	0	0	100
8	0	0	0	0	0	100
9	0	0	0	0	0	100
10	0	0	0	0	0	100
Computed Cust	2	1	1	2	6	63
Section D						
1	0	0	0	0	0	100
2	0	0	0	0	0	100
3	0	0	0	0	0	100
4	0	0	0	0	0	100
5	0	0	0	0	0	100
6	0	0	1	1	2	88
7	0	0	0	0	0	100
8	0	2	0	0	0	100
Assigned Cust	1	1	0	1	3	81

Recommendation: The Department should use the reclassification instrument for returned technical parole violators.

8. Are classification forms user-friendly?

The structure of Item C7 is confusing for staff. At NSP if an inmate is Central Management Case (CMC) the case factor is entered to the right to clarify why “yes” or “no” is entered.

Recommendation: It would be clearer either to require entry of the CMC factor in a space to the right or to list as 7a, 7b, etc. those CMC factors that do exclude inmates from minimum.

9. Are the instructions for completing forms and making a custody and housing decision clear and comprehensive?

Caseworker interviews and discussion of the reliability studies identified the following problems.

#### Section A

Item 1. There is no definition of serious injury, so it is left up to the Caseworker to define whether an injury is serious or not.

Items 3 and 4. The offense codes are incomplete, so that caseworkers are sometimes left to guess at scores for Factors A3 and 4.

According to the Instructions only the conviction charges are to be used, but according to the offense codes the score for robbery is determined by whether a weapon was actually used regardless of the conviction charge. Thus it is unclear whether robberies are to be scored by the JOC or P-SR.

#### Section B

The Instructions should specify that Section B is to always be filled in. In the first place if Section B is not filled out, the Section B Score is misleading. Second the instrument is a security snapshot of the inmate and should be reviewed by the caseworker at each reclassification.

Item 5. The instructions and score-sheet are inconsistent. The instructions leave out the inmate who escaped or attempted escape from medium or above without actual or threatened violence. The score-sheet includes such an inmate.

Item 9. Caseworkers do not know how to determine if a juvenile offense is a felony or misdemeanor.

Item 10. This item has the lowest reliability of all items. Much time is spent calculating the total minimum in cases with consecutive sentences.

### Section C

Item 3. This factor requires estimating whether the inmate will spend time in minimum or lower custody and what action the Parole Board will take. Not surprisingly this is an item that has relatively low reliability. Because it is an item that is often the door to minimum or lower custody, a lot of time is devoted to it. This factor could be entered into the automated system by Central Office staff.

Item 6. Staff are uncertain whether an INS detainer should be an exclusion. Instructions for B8 specify that an INS detainer is to be treated as a Misdemeanor. By that rule an INS detainer should not be checked as a minimum custody exclusion.

### Section D

Item 7. It is unclear to staff when this factor should be checked.

Recommendation: the above issues should be resolved.

10. Are classification staff qualifications commensurate with their responsibilities?

Staff assigned to classification functions appear to be qualified for their work with most of them having college degrees in the social sciences.

Recommendation: none.

11. Do staff receive the necessary training to perform their duties?

Staff reported that they receive little formal classification training. Caseworkers report that they get feedback from supervisors and central office when they make errors on their classification instruments. Therefore they feel confident that in the absence of corrections they are classifying correctly. At NSP caseworkers meet regularly with the supervisor to discuss cases; they find these meetings helpful, at NNCC there are occasional meetings.

Recommendation: hold regular supervisory meetings on classification at NNCC.

12. Are the organizational resources for supporting the classification system adequate?

Caseworkers are able to keep up with the required classifications.

Recommendation: none.

13. Is there adequate involvement of the inmate in his/her classification?

a. Orientation

The overwhelming impression from inmates at reception is that they learn little from staff. One inmate said that learning what would happen to him at reception was like learning about sex as a child - you learn from your peers, and you pick up as much misinformation as information. Inmates agree that they are given a rule book, are told by the Classification Committee what institution and classification level they are recommended for, and that's about it. Caseworkers on the other hand, say that every week an orientation session lasting anywhere from one-half hour to two hours is held for new classification inmates. The classification process and the instrument are explained to the inmates.

We were unable to pursue these contradictory perceptions further. A clue is that caseworkers say they keep their orientation to general topics and set aside inmates' questions about individual problems. Perhaps the Department should create a video to give the inmates a general orientation and use the caseworkers to sit down with inmates and address individual problems. It would also be useful, on a trial basis, to give inmates a copy of their classification instrument. Departments are hesitant to do this for fear that inmates will devour caseworkers' time with protests and questions. In the one state where inmates are given a copy of their score-sheet it is not a problem. It would also be useful, on a trial basis, to give inmates in writing their legal dates. This is being done at the Southern Reception Center.

At General Confinement there was much less inmate distress over lack of information. Inmates explain that coming in to prison is an anxious experience; in time they settle in and learn the ropes.

b. Classification participation

At the Initial Classification Committee Hearing that was observed, though the inmate had an opportunity to ask questions and state a case, the tenor of the Hearing was to inform him of decisions already reached and move on quickly to the next case. At the Reclassification Committee hearings

that were observed there was considerably more give and take between the inmate and the Committee members.

Twenty-four of the 31 inmates in our sample know their current classification. Only three inmates had a firm grasp of the criteria for classification. Most had an idea that criminal history and disciplinary adjustment are important, and that time to release is important for minimum custody.

Recommendation: see above.

14. Is the system efficient?

The major inefficiency concerned the 18 months to probable release criteria for minimum. Caseworkers have to guess whether the inmate is likely to go to minimum, what the Parole Board is likely to do and what Central Office Classification is likely to think the Parole Board is likely to do.

Recommendation: It might be useful for the central office to establish a probable release date for relevant inmates, which Caseworkers can access on NCIS.

## **VALIDATION - UNDERSTANDING WHY INMATES BEHAVE AND MISBEHAVE**

### **Introduction**

Having examined the classification process in both states, the next phase of research focussed on studying why inmate's classified for a particular custody level fail to behave as expected. In the jargon of researchers, this issue has to do with the problem of false positives and false negatives. A "false positive" represents those cases where a person was predicted to behave in a positive or conforming manner but failed to do so. Alternatively, the false negative is one who was predicted to behave in a negative or non-conforming manner but does not.

One group of inmates of great concern to prison administrators who represent false positives are minimum custody inmates who become involved in serious institutional misconduct sufficient to warrant a removal from the facility and a reclassification to a higher custody level. These inmates are "false positives" in the sense that they were predicted or expected to not become involved in such behavior.

A number of organizational or individual factors can potentially explain these behaviors. Perhaps it was simply an error was made in the classification process that resulted in the inmates being misclassified, a lapse in the security procedures at the facility, or a random event that simply cannot be predicted or prevented.

Similarly, one can ask why do inmates who are classified for maximum security facility do not become involved in major incidents (i.e., false negatives)? These inmates are also significant to prison systems as they possibly reflect inmates who are misclassified for maximum security and could be placed in a lower and less expensive security level (under-classified). Alternatively, these same inmates could represent valid placements in that the high security level is producing the necessary security environment to control the inmate's behavior. In evaluating this group, the same factors listed above for the minimum custody inmates apply here as well.

A third category of inmates are the medium custody inmates. Within this group are two sub-categories that need to be evaluated - medium custody inmates who are not exhibiting any disciplinary problems and thus may be "over-classified" and those who were assigned to medium custody but had to be removed to a higher custody level due to misconduct (under-classified)

### **Sampling Methods**

In order to understand why these various groups of inmates behave differently than expected we had to develop a sampling procedure that would purposely sample a wide variety of inmates who have been placed in a similarly wide variety of custody levels. In particular, we developed sampling procedures in each state that selected inmates who met the following conditions:

1. Inmates who were classified for minimum custody subsequently engaged in major disciplinary incidents sufficient to warrant reclassification to medium or higher security.
2. Inmates who were classified for maximum custody for at least 12 months and did not demonstrate serious misconduct.
3. Inmates who were classified for medium custody for at least 12 months and did not demonstrate serious misconduct.
4. Inmates who were classified for medium custody and subsequently engaged in major disciplinary incidents sufficient to warrant reclassification to maximum security.

For each state, the goal was to select a sufficient number of cases from each category to test the merits of this form of analysis. It was hoped that by involving classification staff in the research, they would develop their own in-house capabilities for doing this type of analysis in the future.

Six inmates for each of the four categories or a total of 24 inmates were selected for each state. In selecting the sample, we used each state's automated information system that contained relevant data on the inmate's classification designations, disciplinary incidents, and institutional

transfers. Lists of male and female inmates were prepared by each Department of inmates who met the criteria listed above.

Because each state has a large number of facilities scattered across a large geographic area, it was also decided to only select inmates who were presently housed in a group of maximum, medium and minimum security facilities. For Nevada, this meant that inmates who were currently housed in facilities located in the Carson City were included and for Pennsylvania, the Harrisburg area.

For those three inmate categories that required the presence of a major disciplinary incident, we selected inmates who had such an incident recorded during the past three months. -This was done so that the specifics of the incident were still fresh in the memories of staff and the inmate as well. Once these cases were identified, the first four males and the first two females were selected for analysis.

Clearly, this sampling process does not produce a representative sample of the phenomenon in question. For that to occur would require a far larger sample (at least 50 cases per category) with cases selected without regard to facility location or the date of the major disciplinary incident that triggered the institutional transfer. But despite these limitations, the process did produce enough cases to refine the research methods and, as shown below, generate useful findings.

## **Data Collection**

For each inmate sampled a number of data sources were utilized to better understand the inmate's behavior. First, we received the inmate's complete institutional case file that contained the inmate's sentencing, classification, institutional movement, disciplinary, and basic identifying records. This information was used to verify that the inmate's classification designation and associated institutional placement was done properly. The disciplinary data was used to begin analyzing the factors that precipitated the disciplinary incident for the minimum and medium custody inmates who had been found guilty of a major incident.

In addition to these case file data, interviews were conducted with each inmate to secure their perceptions and opinions of why they have behaved as they have. The interviews were structured to inquire as to whether the inmate felt that his/her own characteristics, the influence or interactions of other inmates or staff, the security of facility or other environmental factors have contributed to their behavior.

Finally, where possible for the medium and minimum custody inmates who have acted out, interviews were also conducted with security and civilian staff who had either witnessed the disciplinary incident or had special knowledge of the incident. Appendix B provides a sample of write-ups of five cases.



## NEVADA VALIDATION FINDINGS

In selecting cases in Nevada, the criteria for defining whether or not an inmate was “behaving” or “non-behaving” was limited to the following types of disciplinary reports:

1. MJ1 - Arson
2. MJ2 - Assault
3. MJ3 - Battery
4. MJ4 - Escape
5. MJ6 - Escape
6. MJ11 - Kidnapping
7. MJ15 - Mayhem
8. MJ19 - Sexual Assault
9. MJ40 - Possession of Contraband

Of these incidents, the most frequent incidents were assault, battery or possession of serious contraband (mostly weapons). Even the so called “violent” incidents often were limited to inmates or staff being pushed or hit but without injury. It should also be added that both staff and inmates often commented that the criteria used by staff to file a formal disciplinary report can and does vary across facilities and by officer within a facility. The lack of uniformity in reporting disciplinary incidents is a common phenomenon that often plagues research studies such as this one.

The following pages summarize the results of the Nevada cases, which are grouped according to the four categories described above.

### Category 1: Inmates Classified Minimum And With Major Disciplinary

For this group two females and four males were selected. In all six cases no errors were found in the classification scoring process. However, one of the six inmates scored medium custody but had his score over-ridden to minimum to allow him to work on forestry work crew. A major reason for the over-ride was the ‘fact the inmate had two prior prison terms and had been placed in a similar minimum security setting without any unusual difficulties. A summary of these six cases is as follows:

1. Three of the six cases involved a personal conflict with another inmate over job conditions that escalated over time. The conflict could revolved around whether another inmate was performing their job properly, competition over who was the senior worker or whether an inmate not working hard. In other words, conflicts that are typical to almost any job situation whether in prison or in conventional society (i.e., situational factors that could not have been anticipated). Two of these incidents resulted in a major fight resulting in a serious injury to one or both of the inmates.

2. One incident involved a direct confrontation with a staff person over a request for immediate medical care. In this case, the inmate became disturbed that he was not going to receive his daily medication. In attempting to get the attention of the unit supervisor he forcibly opened the officer's office door and refused to leave when so ordered.
3. The remaining two incidents were escapes in which the inmate returned late (usually by 2-3 hours) from a community based restitution center. In these two incidents there was no escape from a correctional facility, but rather a failure to return to the facility on time. In both incidents, the inmates provided lengthy explanations as to why they were late in returning to their respective facilities (missing a bus or not realizing that he was expected to be back at the facility).
4. In all these incidents it was clear that the inmates exercised poor judgement in dealing with a conflict situation. For example, in one escape, the inmate simply did not return to his restitution center on time because he wanted to stop at the Reno Hilton Hotel to have a "good dinner and to play the slots for a while." The other escapee failed to report on time to her center because she missed her bus and "didn't have enough money to catch another bus." Instead of contacting the restitution center, she walked to the local jail and turned herself in.
5. However, in the cases involving conflict with another inmate, it is also clear that staff were aware of the potential escalating situation but took little preventive action. For example, in one of the altercations the work supervisor had observed the two inmates, who later got involved in the incident, but did not report the situation to the security staff. Had the behavior been reported, staff agree that the incident could have been prevented.

#### Category 2: Inmates Classified Medium And With Major Disciplinary

This category consisted of inmates who were initially classified medium custody and during the past year of incarceration became involved in at least one major incident. What follows are summaries of three cases and the explanation of the inmate's behavior.

1. One inmate was initially transferred to a medium security facility where he and his brother became involved in a Hispanic gang. During the course of the year, they became disenchanted with the gang's activities and sought to leave it. According to the inmate, members of the gang attempted to knife him and his brother on the yard. He fought back by disarming the inmate and beating him badly thus triggering a battery charge. He was subsequently transferred to another facility where he has not received any more incidents. He is now classified as medium custody and seems to have adjusted well. He describes the incident as "one of those things that could not be avoided."

2. Two inmates view themselves as inmates who are “hot tempered” and “don’t take any shit from anyone.” They were initially classified medium custody largely because of their crimes which did not justify a higher custody level. These inmates eventually became involved in aggressive actions against the staff (battery and failure to obey direct orders). In both instances, the battery consisted of jerking an arm away from a staff person or elbowing a staff person in the ribs.
3. One case consisted of a young inmate (age 18) who is a member of a Las Vegas street gang who was incarcerated at age 16 for robbery and unlawful use of a deadly weapon. He was disciplined for striking an officer in the stomach when placed under forcible arrest for failing to remove his TV from his bed as ordered.

### Category 3: Inmates Classified Medium And With No Major Disciplinaries

Seven inmates who met this criteria were interviewed (6 males and one female). There were no scoring errors found in any of these seven cases. However, the computer system listed these inmates as maximum custody while the manual sheets scored them as medium custody.

These inmates had a violent or sexual crimes (either current offense or a prior record) that prevented them from being placed in lower custody - usually minimum custody. All but one of the cases had receive a lengthy prison term for a very violent crime or series of crimes. Three of the cases were murders, a fourth involved three armed robberies with consecutive sentences of 30 and 20 years, and two others were sex offenders. Examples of this type of inmate are as follows:

1. One inmate was sentenced to prison for murdering the boyfriend of his wife. He received a life sentence with the possibility of parole. He had no prior adult or juvenile criminal record. He was initially assigned to medium custody and did very well at a medium security facility. Because of his good behavior and lack of prior criminal behavior, he was paroled after having served approximately five years. However, he subsequently had his parole violated (technical violator) after getting into another fight with the boyfriend of his second wife. He is back in medium custody but can never be placed in minimum custody due to the DOC restriction that inmates who have been involved in a recent violent crime (the parole violation).
2. A second case consisted of man who was sentenced to prison for murder with the possibility of parole and has done about 9 years without any major tickets. He was initially classified as maximum custody when he first arrived but has subsequently been reduced in custody over time.
3. The third cases is a 70 year old man who is serving Life without the possibility of parole. He has been incarcerated since 1981 and has not received any disciplinary reports. His crime was inflicted upon his then wife. His only prior

crimes were misdemeanors associated with his alcoholism (drunk driving, drinking in public, fighting, and reckless driving).

4. The single women had received a 10 year sentence for two charges of theft and larceny that took place in two casinos. This case was different from the other five in that although she had not been involved in any major incidents, she had been involved in a number of incidents where she refused to follow an order or was disrespectful to security staff.

In summary, these inmates are extremely conforming and pose no obvious threat to the security of the facility. Nonetheless, the nature of their crimes means that the Department can ill afford for any of them to escape or even attempt an escape. Institutional risk is not the issue for these inmates. Rather, the potential liability of these inmates to the credibility of the Department is so great that they are placed in a higher security setting than they require. This form of “over-classification” is by design and quite understandable.

#### Category 4: Inmates Classified Maximum And With No Major Disciplinary

Most cases in this category were inmates initially classified medium custody who subsequently became involved in misconduct that triggered a reclassification to higher custody (close) and transfer to a more secure facility. In Nevada, the primary maximum custody facility is the Ely Prison, which is located in a remote area of Nevada. Due to the budgetary limitations of this grant, it was decided to have inmates housed at the Nevada State Prison, which is now a medium security facility, but has the capacity to house inmates in maximum custody. Most of these maximum custody inmates were housed in a high security unit known as Unit 13. This unit is reserved for inmates who have had a major disciplinary incident and have been placed in “disciplinary segregation.” Consequently, the inmates selected here have had major disciplinary action taken against them in the past but have remained free of such incidents for at least 12 months.

The fact that an inmate can be assigned to a high security disciplinary segregation unit for more than a year and still be disciplinary free reflects Nevada’s disciplinary segregation policy, which allows inmates to be “sentenced” to disciplinary segregation status for years at a time. In an effort to compromise this policy, inmates can and routinely are “early released” from the unit at the recommendation of the inmate’s caseworker and administrative staff. Examples of these cases are as follows:

1. One case was an older inmate (by Nevada prison standards) about 50 years old who had been sentenced to prison for robbing a bank. Due to his age and the absence of a prior criminal record (he started robbing banks after his business went bankrupt and got himself into financial difficulties, he was initially classified medium custody and had no difficulties for several years. Over a year ago, however, he was written up for having in his possession a tool for punching holes

in leather for which he was sentenced to disciplinary segregation for 12 months. He has not had any other disciplinary problems since then.

2. The second case consisted of another older inmate (age 45) who periodically gets into fights with younger inmates who in his words “start challenging me - so I’ve got to take a stand.” Aside from these incidents that have occurred once every 2-3 years, his disciplinary record has been quite good. For the past 12 months since being assigned to Unit 13, he has not received any major incidents. However, there was historical pattern of this kind of occasional disruptive behavior when placed in medium general population for the inmate’s entire history of incarceration.

For these inmates, it does appear that the high security design of Unit 13 does indeed “suppress” many of these inmate’s potentially negative behavior. They are single celled and allowed to be on the yard with only a small number of other inmates (6-10). Furthermore, many of these inmates have done many years of incarceration and are now beginning to bum out.

## **PENNSYLVANIA VALIDATION FINDINGS**

**The Pennsylvania cases were analyzed in a similar manner as the Nevada cases. Inmates who had been convicted of serious misconducts similar to those listed for the Nevada cases were selected for analysis. Like Nevada, most of these incidents did not involve serious injury but more often threats of violence or possession of weapons.**

### Category 1: Inmates Classified Minimum And With Major Disciplinary

1. Of these six cases none involved serious injury and all but one were isolated incidents in otherwise good disciplinary records. It is hard to see why any of these inmates needed maximum security, yet all were reclassified to maximum. Two incidents involved inmate/staff conflicts, three inmate/inmate conflicts and one self-injury.
2. The inmate/staff incidents occurred at two new prisons. The cases require an understanding of the setting at these two new prisons. Both are not overpopulated; they both are well-designed to provide good line of sight for supervision and they both have experienced staff. On the other hand they do not have enough staff yet to run programs and any but the most minimal work details. Therefore inmates have little to do. Also, staff are determined to demonstrate that they control the prisons. They contrast their prisons with other prisons where, so they say, the prisoners run the prisons. Therefore prison staff are quick to exercise their authority. This stance clearly antagonized the inmates we interviewed and contributed to their unsuccessful adjustment. (Of course it may have contributed to the successful adjustment of other inmates.)

3. The three inmate/inmate incidents occurred in predictable sets of circumstances. Two were racial; one white/black and one Hispanic/black. The third incident occurred between young inmates in a handball game. Thus, all the incidents occurred in unsurprising circumstances.
4. The self-injury incident involved an inmate with a history of mental illness. He was distressed, asked to taken to the Mental Hygiene Unit, the officer refused, so he cut himself.
5. Only one inmate had a record of persistent disciplinary problems. Therefore, for five of these incidents, while it could be predicted that incidents would be more likely in these settings, it would be very hard to predict who would be involved.

#### Category 2: Inmates Classified Medium And With Major Disciplinaries

1. Two inmates have persistent disciplinary problems. They both also have mental health problems. One is confused, quick to conclude that people were against him and assaultive. In his instant offense he had been staying with his nephew; when a friend of his nephew showed up, assumed the friend was an intruder and stabbed him, nearly killing him. The second inmate is a consistent nuisance, though according to staff not a dangerous one.
2. Three of these inmates were reclassified to max as a result of isolated incidents. One inmate resented his transfer to medium and was looking for a way to get back to a maximum security unit. One inmate got into an argument with an officer after he felt the officer failed to respond to an injury on the baseball field. The third inmate got into a fight with another inmate over an insult. According to their counselors, all three of these inmates were still medium security inmates who need not have been reclassified.
3. One inmate was reclassified after two incidents. In one an inmate attacked him, and he defended himself. In the other incident he was charged with making a lot of noise in his cell. His counselor believes he should be classified minimum not maximum.

#### Category 3: Inmates Classified Medium And With No Major Disciplinaries

1. Of these six inmates, two present problems, though neither are rebellious or assaultive.
2. One is an endless nuisance who requires frequent supervision. The other is very young, small eager to please and thus vulnerable.

3. The other four inmates who have been in prison from 8 to 10 months had no disciplinary problems.
4. All six of these inmates have been in the Department less than one year. Barring a serious misconduct, their criminal records are such that they are likely to be reclassified minimum at their annual review.

#### Category 4: Inmates Classified Maximum And With No Major Disciplinaries

1. Of these six inmates, one has demonstrated over 18 years that he needs maximum security. He never goes more than six months without a major misconduct.
2. One inmate got a major assault misconduct almost a year ago and is still maximum.
3. One inmate has been in prison six months without incident and will probably be medium at his next reclassification.
4. One inmate has two recent misconducts for disobeying a direct order.
5. Four of the six inmates have long sentences, serious violent crimes and six or more years to earliest release. Three of these have good adjustment records.

### **SUMMARY**

**This phase of the evaluation illustrated the value of qualitative methods for better understanding how an objective prison classification system functions within a prison system and those complex personal and environmental forces that influence an inmate's behavior. Although there were several weaknesses in the classification system, the research also validated the overall soundness of the system in terms of classifying inmates according to each Department's formal policies and procedures.**

**A summary of the major findings and recommendations that stem from both states are as follows:**

#### **Nevada Findings**

1. Some staff were classifying inmates not according to their assessed custody level but according to the security level of the facility. In other words, inmates who were judged to be close custody were assigned the designation of medium custody in order to qualify for placement in the general population at a particular facility.
2. Although some of the serious misconducts that were analyzed in this report can be attributed to an individual's lack of judgement and/or impulsive actions, there were also indications that many of these incidents can be prevented by more

aggressive staff action. This was especially so for inmates classified minimum custody who subsequently received a major disciplinary report.

3. The security attributes of particular housing areas were especially influential in suppressing misconduct within close and maximum security units. In some cases classified as close custody and without major incidents for at least 12 months, the primary reason for the lack of negative behavior is the tight security.
4. There is a growing number of inmates who are well-behaved and pose little risk to prison or public safety but who cannot be placed in a lower custody level because of the nature of their crime. While it may not be politically feasible to assign these inmates to community-based facilities, there is a growing need for Departments of Corrections to begin planning for housing units and perhaps entire facilities for long-term and older inmates who require minimal internal security and medium external security (e.g., fences, remote locations, etc.).

### **Nevada Recommendations**

1. Require better documentation of the automated classification records. It was clear that a significant portion of the cases did not have sufficient information to justify the current custody level. Recommend in particular that the automated system be re-designed so that the classification record can not be exited until all of the fields have the appropriate data entered.
2. Inmates who are scored and assessed at a particular level should not have their custody level changed to meet the security level of the inmate.
3. Staff need to become more pro-active in anticipating problems that are clearly emerging between inmates and staff. There were several examples where the staff seem to wait for the incident to occur.
4. An inmate's custody level should always be determined by the objective classification score or via an over-ride and not by the facility's security level.
5. The Department should have housing for long-term and older inmates who require minimum internal security and medium external security.

### **Pennsylvania Findings**

1. Staff believe that the PACT places too much emphasis on inmate misconduct. An assault will add 10 to 11 points and almost automatically result in an inmate being reclassified for maximum custody. Staff say that if they did a PACT on every inmate who gets a misconduct for assault they would reclassify many inmates unnecessarily. Therefore they subvert the system (or save the system, depending



on how you look at it) by doing PACTs selectively. Unfortunately this practice increases the inconsistency that the PACT is supposed to reduce.

2. Both inmates and staff present a clear picture of the determinants of institutional adjustment. In our interviews, the responsibility lies with the inmate. He/she can adjust if one so chooses. One must be willing to be obedient to officers and respect inmates.. While there are obstacles to both, they are not insurmountable.

At the same time staff and inmates that were interviewed agree that circumstances play a part in influencing inmate adjustment. For example, inmates at one newly opened prison agreed that because there was little programming offered and because staff were determined to establish their authority, it was harder to avoid misconducts. Finally, it was felt that inmates with a longer time to serve have less incentive to avoid trouble. This point was dramatically confirmed by two inmates who expected to be released shortly. Though both said they had no trouble getting along in prison, both were staying out of the yard to avoid trouble rather than jeopardize their release.

3. As indicated above, the PACT re-assessment is heavily weighted on the inmate's institutional adjustment. Most inmates can work their way to minimum security by good adjustment in prison, regardless of their criminal records. This heavy weight on prison behavior is consistent with participants' assessment of risk. Since participants think that good adjustment is the result of a decision to adjust well, the PACT measures that inclination to do well.
4. Of the 24 cases in the sample, 12 had serious misconducts and 12 did not. What is most striking is that the study does not show differences in the qualitative data associated with the successful and unsuccessful inmates. This absence of differences between the two groups is consistent with the fact that nine of the 12 unsuccessful inmates were involved in isolated incidents. It appears as though given slightly altered circumstances the successful inmates might have been the unsuccessful ones and vice versa. The two inmates who stayed away from the yard because they did not want to get in trouble just before meeting their Parole Boards teach us a lesson. Prison is an environment in which staying out of trouble is unpredictable; when the stakes (such as Parole release) are high, it is wise to stay out of the action as much as possible.
5. The 24 case studies included 43 initial and/or reclassification decisions; yet there were no overrides. In talking with counselors, our impression is that they were unclear about the appropriate use of overrides.

## **Pennsylvania Recommendations**

1. The Department should more closely monitor the system to ensure that a classification is done following a serious misconduct.
2. The high weight assigned for inmate assaults should be re-evaluated as it may be too severe. There are some indications that staff may be reacting to this situation by ignoring reclassifications when an assault occurs to prevent an inmate from being placed in maximum custody.
3. Staff need more training in when to use an over-ride. The Department has is not entirely successful in removing persistently disruptive inmates from reduced security. To do so would probably require the use of more overrides.
4. The Department should consider reclassifying inmates more frequently, if its goal is to place inmates at the lowest possible level of security.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INMATE AND STAFF INTERVIEW SCHEDULES**

**QUALITATIVE EVALUATION PROJECT**

**INMATE INTERVIEW - RECEPTION**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Prison: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Race: \_\_\_\_\_ Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_ IO: \_\_\_\_\_ Time to

Serve: \_\_\_\_\_

1.
  - a. Where were you before you were received into the Dept.?
  - b. For how long?
2. When were you received into the Dept.?
3. Describe the classification process you've been through.
4. How did you learn what was going to happen in classification?
5. Tell me about your contact with Classification staff.
6.
  - a. How was your stay in Classification explained to you?
  - b. How was your stay in General Confinement explained to you?
  - c. Did you have any problems with the explanations?
  - d. Did you have questions?
  - e. Did you ask them?
  - f. If not, why not?
  - g. What answers did you get?
  - h. Were they satisfactory?
  - i. If not, why not?
  - j. Looking back, what do you think were your main concerns when you first arrived at Reception?
  - k. If you were going to tell a new inmate what he needs to know about Recep, what would you tell him?
7.
  - a. Did you have any dealings with your Classification Counselor?
  - b. Tell me about what happened.
8.
  - a. Do you know what your classification is?'
  - b. Do you know why you are classified \_\_\_\_\_?  
If not, why?
  - c. Do you think your classification is in accordance with Dept. policies and procedures?
  - d. If not, why not?
  - e. Based on your knowledge of other inmates' classification, do you think yours is fair?
  - f. If not, why not?
  - g. Do you agree with your classification?
  - h. If not, why not?

9.
  - a. Tell me about your adjustment in jail. Immediately before coming to prison what fails were you in and for how long?
  - b. any problems?
  - c. with inmates?
  - d. with staff?
  - e. Have you seen other inmates threatened verbally?
  - f. What happened?
  - g. Have you seen other inmates threatened physically?
  - h. What happened?
  - i. Have you been threatened verbally?
  - j. What happened?
  - k. Have you been threatened physically?
  - l. What happened?
  
10.
  - a. Tell me about your adjustment since you came to prison.
  - b. Did you find it different from jail?
  - c. If so, how?
  - d. any problems?
  - e. with inmates?
  - f. with staff?
  - g. Have you seen other inmates in Recep threatened verbally?
  - h. What happened?
  - i. Have you seen other inmates in Recep threatened physically?
  - j. What happened?
  - k. Have you been threatened verbally in Recep?
  - l. What happened?
  - m. Have you been threatened physically in Recep?
  - n. what happened?
  - o. Have you been hurt in Recep?
  - p. What happened?
  - q. Have you had things taken away from you in Recep?
  - r. What happened?
  - s. Tell me about your most recent infraction (if there is one)?
  - t. It is easier to stay out of trouble in some places than others (cell, cubicle, dorm, yard, assignment)?
  - u. What do inmates do to keep themselves safe?
  - v. What do you do to keep yourself safe?
  
11.
  - a. It is said that many inmates have difficulties adjusting at the beginning of their terms. Why do you think that is?
  - b. Did you find it true of yourself?
  
12.
  - a. What family members do you have?
  - b. With whom?
  - c. What kind (call, letters, visits)?
  
13. What difference does your classification make to you?
  
14. How would you classify inmates?

- 15 What improvements would you make in the classification process?
- 16 What should I know about the classification system that I

QUALITATIVE EVALUATION PROJECT  
INMATE INTERVIEW - GENERAL CONFINEMENT

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Prison: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Race: \_\_\_\_\_ Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_ IO: \_\_\_\_\_ Time To  
Serve:

1. Tell me your transfer history since you've been received into the Dept.
2.
  - a. What is your classification now?
  - b. What is it previously?
3.
  - a. What is the procedure for reclassification, as you've experienced it?
  - b. How is the reclassification procedure explained to you?
4.
  - a. When were you last reclassified?
  - b. Tell me about it?
  - c. Were you notified in advance of your interview?
  - d. What happened at your interview?
5.
  - a. Can you tell me why you are classified as you are?
  - b. Did you see or received a copy of your reclassification?
  - c. Do you think your reclassification is in accordance with Dept. policies and procedures?
  - d. If not, why not?
  - e. Based on your knowledge of other inmates' reclassification, do you think yours is fair?
  - f. If not, why not?
  - g. Do you agree with your reclassification?
  - h. If not, why not?
6.
  - a. Tell me about your adjustment since you came to prison.
  - b. Did you find it different from jail?
  - c. If so, how?
  - d. any problems?
  - e. with inmates?
  - f. with staff?
  - g. Have you seen other inmates in threatened verbally?
  - h. What happened?
  - i. Have you seen other inmates in threatened physically?
  - j. What happened?
  - k. Have you been threatened verbally in?
  - l. What happened?
  - m. Have you been threatened physically in?
  - n. What happened?
  - o. Have you been hurt in?
  - p. What happened?
  - q. Have you had things taken away from you in?



- r. What happened?
  - s. Tell me about your most recent infraction (if there is one)?
  - t. It is easier to stay out of trouble in some places than others (cell, cubicle, dorm, yard, assignment)?
  - u. What do inmates do to keep themselves safe?
  - v. What do you do to keep yourself safe?
- 7.
- a. How was your classification explained to you?
  - b. Did you have any problems with the explanations?
  - c. Did you have questions?
  - d. Did you ask them?
  - f. If not, why not?
  - g. What answers did you get?
  - h. Were they satisfactory?
  - i. If not, why not?
- 8.
- a. What family members do you have?
  - b. What is the last family contact you have had?
  - c. With whom?
  - d. What kind: (call, letters, visits)
9. What difference does your reclassification make to you?
10. a. What do you think about the mix of inmates here?
11. How would you reclassify inmates?
12. What improvements would you make in the reclassification process?
13. What should I know about the classification system that I haven't thought to ask you?

QUALITATIVE EVALUATION PROJECT

SUPERVISOR INTERVIEW

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Prison: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you worked in your present position?  
What were your previous positions?

Tell me your responsibilities  
quality control?  
training new counselors?

Tell me about your most recent training session training  
old counselors?

Tell me about your most recent training session orient  
inmate?

collect info on inmate?  
identify inmate needs?  
identify inmate placement?  
other?

How many counselors do you supervise?  
What feedback do you give counselors?

What training did you get?  
Tell me about your most recent training session?  
What feedback do you get on how you're doing?

What problems do you have with the opcs?  
Scoresheet?  
Instructions?  
Information on which it is based  
what info do you use?  
is it timely?  
complete?  
accurate?  
what about the info from the jails?  
what difference do info problems make?  
What are the most common errors?

How is the inmate involved in his classification?  
what info do you get from him?  
what do you tell him?

What do you do when available inmates and beds don't match?

What changes have there been this year?  
what were the effects of these changes?

What are the advantages of the opcs?

What improvements would you make in the classification system?

## QUALITATIVE EVALUATION PROJECT

### COUNSELOR INTERVIEW

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Prison: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1.
  - a. How long have you worked in your present position?
  - b. What were your previous positions?
2. Tell me your responsibilities
  - a. orient inmates?
  - b. collect info on inmate?
  - c. identify inmate security classification?
  - d. identify inmate program classification?
  - e. identify inmate other classification?
  - f. identify inmate placement?
  - g. Other?
3. What is the size of our caseload?
4.
  - a. What training did you get?
  - b. Tell me about your most recent training session?
5.
  - a. What feedback do you get on how you're doing?
  - b. from supervisors?
  - c. from other staff?
  - d. from inmates?
  - e. any monitoring reports?
6.
  - a. What problems do you have with the opcs?
  - b. scoresheet?
  - c. instructions?
  - d. When was the last time you referred to the instructions?
  - e. what info do you use?
  - f. if it timely?
  - g. complete?
  - h. accurate?
  - i. what about the info from the jails?
  - j. what difference do info problems make?
7.
  - a. How often do you use overrides?
  - b. How often did you use overrides the last week you worked?
  - c. Do you remember the last one?
  - d. What are the most common reasons you use overrides?
8. How is the inmate involved in his classification?
  - a. When do you see him?
  - b. For how long?
  - c. what info do you get from him?
  - d. what do you tell him?

9.
  - a. How up-to-date are you on your classifications?
  - b. If behind, why?
  
10.
  - a. What changes have there been this year in the classification system?
  - b. What were the effects of these changes?
  
11. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the opcs?
  
12. What improvements would you make in the classification system?
  
13. What should I know about classification that I haven't thought to ask you?

# QUALITATIVE EVALUATION PROJECT

## MANAGER INTERVIEW

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Prison: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

1.
  - a. What are your major concerns with the Classification system?
  - b. What do you expect of it?
  - c. What are the major problems?
2. Have any changes been made in the Classification system this year?
  - a. What were they?
  - b. When were they made?
  - c. What have been the most important changes for you?
  - d. How were they made?
  - e. Why were they made?
3.
  - a. To what extent have inmates and beds been properly matched this year?
  - b. To the extent they haven't been, why?
  - c. Imbalance
  - d. Info problem (can't find mismatches)
  - e. Transport problem
  - f. Control problem (Wardens. won't let go)
  - g. How do you try to create a match?
  - h. How big a problem is it?
4. How do you know if classification is actually in accordance with Dept. policy?
  - a. coverage
  - b. accurate
  - c. reliable
  - d. timely
  - e. efficient
  - f. info collected accurately
  - g. inmate orientation
5. How do you decide how many staff of what kinds are necessary to do classification?
6. What training is provided to Classification staff?

7. Have there been any legal challenges this year?
  - a. to the system?  
What were they?  
What happened?
  - b. to individual classifications?  
What were they?  
What happened?
8. What improvements are you considering making to the classification system?
9.
  - a. What management reports do you get?
  - b. What additional reports do you need?
10. What procedures do you have for reviewing the classification system?
11. What should I know about the classification system that I haven't thought to ask-you?

**APPENDIX B**  
**SAMPLE CASE STUDIES**

Case #: 1

Age: 37 **Race:** black **Marital Status:** single  
**Military:** none **Education:** 10th grade  
**Employment:** unemployed

**Instant Offense:** Drug possess **Sentence:** **Received:** 2/93 **ERD:**  
11/94 ME: 11/97

**Criminal History Arrests:** 13 **Convictions:** 1  
**Incarcerations State:** 0  
**Local:** 6  
**Pattern:** numerous arrests for numbers running

**Substance abuse:** drugs & alcohol **Medical/Psych:**

**Transfer History:** Recep to Graterford(5/93) to Mahonney (8/93) to Waymart (8/93)

**Disciplinary "** : none  
**Program "** : none at Mahonney  
**Work "** none at Mahonney

**Initial Classification Custody Level:** none **Override:** none  
**Reclassification "** 2 **none**

**Housing:** inmate Level 2 and placed in Level 2 unit

**Precipitating Incident:** According to B., he was upset because his mother and father had both died recently. On 8/19 in the evening when he went to dinner, he didn't like the food he was, so he left and went to the Rec Room. The officer, who was female, shouted at him to go back to the dining room. He answered her and then went to another officer to protest the officer's behavior. He was written up and shipped out. B. contends that if the officer had spoken to him respectfully, there would have been no problem. "I may be an inmate, but I'm not a dog."

**Prison Background:** B. had no write-ups prior to this incident. According to B. he had no problems with other staff or with inmates. At Mahonney he volunteered to work in the kitchen.

**Street Background:** B. said he doesn't use drugs and was caught up in a drug sweep with \$1,000 in his pocket. He said his criminal history consisted of numerous arrests for running numbers.

B. 's parents died recently, as mentioned above. His father was a policeman. He has 3 sisters and 7 brothers; he writes and calls them.

B. left school in the 11th grade, because he wanted to stay out of the gang wars.

B. struck me as a bit slow.



Case #: 2

Age: 31 **Race:** black **Marital Status:** single  
**Military:** none **Education:**  
**Employment:** unemployed

**Instant Offense:** Ag assault **Sentence:** 3 - 10 **Received:** 8/92 **ERD:**  
5/94 ME: 5/01

**Criminal History Arrests:** 3 **Convictions:** 3  
**Incarcerations State:** 0  
**Local:** 6  
**Pattern:** assaultive and drug arrests

**Substance abuse:** drugs & alcohol **Medical/Psych:**

**Transfer History:** Recep to Grater-ford to Coal Town to Waymart

**Disciplinary ” :** none  
**Program ” :** none  
**Work ” :** none

**Initial Classification Custody Level:** none **Override:** none  
**Reclassification ” 4** none

**Housing:** inmate Level 4 and placed in Level 4 unit

**Precipitating Incident:** According to C, he was talking on the phone; he went over the allotted 15 minutes (there was no clock.) The officer shouted into the phone that C had to end the call. The officer was very disrespectful. After C got off the phone, C cursed out the officer.

**Prison Background:** According to C, he had no writeups at Grater-ford and was doing very well there. He had been reclassified to Level 2 and was being considered for furlough. He was transferred to Coal Town, where he found staff prejudiced against Graterford inmates. They kept reminding him that this was not Graterford. They did things for the sole purpose of demonstrating that they were in control. He had problems from the beginning with the officer who finally wrote him up. He felt that he had got to Coal Town because he had adjusted very well at Graterford and furthermore he had never asked to come to Coal Town. Furthermore Coal Town was not ready to take inmates, so that there was almost nothing to do; which again was not the inmates' fault. C much preferred being behind the wall and intended one way or another to get back there.

According to his counselor, C was no problem to the counselor, but he had a poor housing adjustment record.

**Street Background:** According to C., in the instant offense he got into an argument with his girlfriend. Her brother got involved and he got a shotgun and shot it. In his previous

Case #: 2 (Continued)

conviction a friend of C was being assaulted, so he got a baseball bat and came to his friend's aid. In C's opinion, he has a very bad temper and his behavior was not justified.

C lives with his parents, two sisters, two nieces and his daughter. He talks to his mother a lot on the phone. She tells him he must stand up for himself.

C likes to cook, and worked as a cook at a nursing home till he was laid off.

Case #: 3

Age: 26 Race: white Marital Status: single  
Military: none Education: 9th grade  
Employment: mechanic

Instant Offense: Ag assault Sentence: 5 - 10 Received: 8/92 ERD:  
8/97 ME: 8/02

Criminal History Arrests: 4 Convictions: 3  
Incarcerations State: 2  
Local: 1  
Pattern: assault and theft

Substance abuse: drugs Medical/Psych: no

Transfer History: Recep to Camp Hill to Frackville (6/93)  
Disciplinary " : none  
Program " : none  
Work " none

Initial Classification Custody Level: 4 Override: none  
Reclassification 4 none

Housing: inmate Level 4 and placed in Level 4 unit

Precipitating Incident: According to M, who has Clan and Nazi tattoos on his right arm, he was in his cell one day when a black inmate porter came up to the door and started insulting him. M. told the inmate to leave him alone but the inmate persisted. The black inmate then told the officer to open M's cell because M had some laundry to do. When the officer opened his cell door, M and the black inmate went to the closet and fought.

Prison Background: M. has no previous infractions during his term. He was in the GED program mornings, until the above incident. His counselor sees M as an inmate who gets by acting tough, though in fact he is not assaultive in prison.

Street Background: According to M, in the instant offense an acquaintance notified the police that M was driving a car without a license. When the police tried to arrest him M got into a high-speed chase. When his car crashed and the policeman tried to arrest him again, M fought the policeman. M has two prior non-violent convictions; he says he was innocent of both. M says he comes from a family of bikers and from an early age he was in conflict with authority. When anything bad happened around him, it was assumed he was guilty. He is close to his family, which is very large.

Case #: 4

**Age:** 35 **Race:** black **Marital Status:** separated  
**Military:** none **Education:** 11th grade  
**Employment:** none

**Instant Offense:** drug sale **Sentence:** 4 1/2-12 **Received:** 11/90  
**ERD:** 3/93 **ME:** 9/02

**Criminal History Arrests:** **Convictions:** 8  
**Incarcerations State:** 1  
**Local:** 7  
**Pattern:** drug sales

**Substance abuse:** drugs **Medical/Psych:** schizophrenic

**Transfer History:** Recep to Camp Hill to Frackville (9/91)  
**Disciplinary ” :** two in last six months  
**Program ” :** none  
**Work ” :** none

**Initial Classification Custody Level:** 4 **Override:** none  
**Reclassification** 4 **none**

**Housing:** inmate Level 4 and placed in Level 4 unit

**Precipitating Incident:** M was upset and wanted to talk with the Mental Health staff. When the officer refused, M cut himself.

**Prison Background:** M has had three infractions in his two and a half years back in prison. Neither of the other two were major. He has participated in a variety of programs. M finds his current prison better than the one he was in before. There, officers let the inmates do as they pleased; so there were more contraband and weapons. Here the officers keep tighter control so it is safer. On the other hand here each officer has his own version of the rules, so you have to be able to adapt. M finds that prison adjustment is a matter of handling your losses and learning to take orders from others without feeling weak and dependent.

**Street Background:** M's instant offense is selling drugs. He says his sister, with whom he had been living while on Parole, had to ask him to leave. He was living on the streets and it was getting cold. He sold drugs to a known undercover officer so he would get incarcerated. He has been selling drugs to earn money and support his drug habit since 1981. He has a history of mental health hospitalizations and is on medication. He was living on SSI. M has very limited family contact.

Case #: 5

Age: 31 **Race:** hispanic **Marital Status:** single  
**Military:** none **Education:** 10th grade  
**Employment:** rebuild motors

**Instant Offense:** drug sale. **Sentence:** 4 - 8 **Received:** 4/91 **ERD:**  
8/94 ME: 8/98

**Criminal History Arrests:** 6 **Convictions:** 3  
**Incarcerations State:** 1  
**Local:** 0  
**Pattern:** drug sales

**Substance abuse:** marijuana **Medical/Psych:**

**Transfer History:** Recep to Camp Hill to Frackville

**Disciplinary ” :** one in last six months  
**Program ” :** none  
**Work ” :** kitchen

**Initial Classification Custody Level:** 3 **Override:** none  
**Reclassification** 4 none

**Housing:** inmate Level 4 and placed in Level 4 unit

**Precipitating Incident:** D was working in the kitchen and was told to bring a fresh supply of hot-food to the serving line. As he was pulling the cart of hot food he warned the servers of the hot food cart just behind them. One of the servers accidentally brushed his elbow against the cart and got slightly hurt. He complained, D apologized and it was over. However the server next to him said he would have punched D and proceeded to do so. So they fought. D says the inmate was troublesome to other inmates in the kitchen. Both got 60 days, but D was released after 4 days.

**Prison Background:** D has had only one infraction in his four and a half years in prison. He says he has involved himself in programs, offered to do extra kitchen shifts and translates Spanish for staff. He says he finds it easy to get along with whites and Hispanics, but that blacks act as though you owe them something. He also is wary of long-termers, who tend to disrespect staff, bully inmates and think nothing of carrying and using weapons. Working in the kitchen has its problems, since inmates pressure you to serve them more food. He pays someone to volunteer to serve in his place. Adjusting to prison means learning to do as you are told and mind your own business.

Case #: 5 (Continued)

**Street Background:** D helped in a drug sale and was caught. He has two other drug sale convictions. D has had steady jobs on the street, but they have been low-paying jobs that were insufficient to support his family. So he sold drugs to supplement his income. It is frustrating to work a regular job for meager income and watch young drug dealers make lots of money.