

**FINAL REPORT  
ARTHUR LIMAN PUBLIC INTEREST PROGRAM**

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**The Correctional Association & the Prison Visiting Project**

This summer, I interned with the Prison Visiting Project at the **Correctional Association of New York (CA)**. The CA is a unique organization that investigates prison conditions (for men, women, and juveniles) in New York State and advocates for change in criminal justice policies. Since 1884, the CA has been the only organization in the U.S. with legislative authority to inspect state prisons and report findings to the New York State Department of Correctional Services, members of the legislature, and the public. The CA uses this mandate to advocate for better policies, both those related specifically to prison conditions and those that affect incarceration more broadly. For example, the current public policy campaign focuses on repealing the Rockefeller Drug Laws.

The project I interned with was the **Prison Visiting Project (PVP)**, the arm of the CA that investigates conditions in men's facilities. The PVP visits one prison per month, interviewing staff and inmates, touring the facilities, and collecting general statistics on the facility. In addition, PVP staff collect the information of inmates willing to fill out a

survey about the facility. These surveys ask about a range of topics, including educational and vocational programs, violence levels, staff-inmate relations, and medical services. This information is used after the visit to make more rigorous assessments of the prisons. Staff craft reports for each facility and distribute them to Department officials, the legislature, and the public. They argue for prison improvements based on inmate's perceptions, CA staff perceptions, and best practices in the field.

The PVP also uses prison visits to investigate broader issues.<sup>1</sup> Recent inquiries have looked at health services and disciplinary confinement in New York State, for instance. The PVP's current project focuses on substance abuse treatment programs. They have been collecting data for over one year and plan to add several more prisons to the study in the coming year. PVP staff are aided by an advisory board of expert consultants. When this project is complete, the CA will present and disseminate the results, using their relationships with legislators and prison officials to advocate for changes in the way that New York State prisons address substance abuse treatment.

Lastly, PVP responds to a tremendous volume of inmate correspondence. These letters help to keep staff in touch with conditions in the prisons and to identify major problems. In addition, PVP staff send inmates much-needed information and advocacy resources.

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<sup>1</sup> The prison visits are generally two days long. The first day is devoted to general conditions and the second day is reserved for the PVP's current special project.

## **My Internship**

I had two main responsibilities with the PVP this summer:

1) I assisted staff on visits to three medium-security prisons in upstate New York. At these prison visits, I spoke with inmates and staff about their thoughts about the facility; transcribed notes from meetings with staff in every part of the prison; and evaluated the conditions of prison classrooms, dormitories, disciplinary confinement cells, mess halls, libraries, medical offices, and recreation areas. I also explained to inmates the purpose of the PVP's visit and signed volunteers up for the CA surveys. At each of these prisons, we sent 700-1000 surveys to the inmate population.

2) I collaborated with staff and research consultants to conduct preliminary evaluations of the substance abuse treatment programs project's inmate survey data. In doing so, I helped CA staff to assess the current state of their data collection efforts and to crystallize their plans for the final evaluation. In addition, these analyses helped to bring an added level of statistical sophistication to their reporting process. I also drafted reports for the substance abuse treatment programs at two of the prisons I visited.

In addition to these two main responsibilities, I also provided general support for the CA's efforts, including assisting with the mailings of the surveys and responding to inmate correspondence.

## **Memorable Moment**

Over the course of the summer, there have been many memorable moments. My fellow interns at the CA, the staff members I assisted, and the inmates and staff persons at the prisons I visited all had an impact on me. I enjoyed the sense of camaraderie at the CA as well as the ways I was able to help many of the other interns who were just finishing their college careers. My heart goes out to many of the men that took the risk of speaking with us at the prisons and I am in deep gratitude to the CA staff members who work tirelessly to lighten the burden of incarceration.

If I had to pick one “ah-ha” moment, it would be the enormous diversity in prison administration I witnessed. Top-level administrators had very different management styles and responses to the presence of CA staff members and these differing responses reverberated in the actions and demeanor of the staff members and inmates. In the year up to the Liman Fellowship, I had been considering several potential research projects that focused on the differences among prisons. One of the topics I found fascinating was the impact of differing administration policies, practices, and personalities. Receiving a Liman Fellowship and an internship at the CA allowed me to experience first-hand how different administrations contribute to different prison climates, levels of staff morale and cohesion, inmate participation in programs, and levels of violence.

In addition, working on the substance abuse treatment program has energized my interest in studying prison-based programming. Although in academia, the dominant discourse about prison programming is the decline of rehabilitative ideal starting in the 1970’s,

prison administrators at some of the facilities described how programming has increased in the last 10 years and how they are striving to rehabilitate offenders. In the next year, I plan to use nationwide data sources to evaluate the long-term trends in prison programming over recent decades to understand what has happened to prison programs and whether they are growing, shrinking, and/or shifting in emphasis from certain types of programs to others. This research will help us to better understand the experiences of the 1.6 million individuals who are currently in state or federal prisons.

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