



Corrections &  
Sentencing

# DCS Spring 2023 Newsletter

Editor: Dr. Colleen Berryessa  
School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University

## Division Chair's Corner

Hello, Division of Corrections and Sentencing members—I am pleased to announce that we are currently the largest Division within ASC with 333 members! It was great to see everyone who was able to make it to ASC in Atlanta last November. We sold over 175 tickets for our breakfast meeting and enjoyed a fantastic presentation from Nancy Lavigne, Director of the National Institute of Justice, and Alex Piquero, Director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics. We are already busy planning a full calendar of events for our time together in Philadelphia this November.



**Shelley Johnson**  
**DCS Chair**

We hope that you enjoy our Spring newsletter, as it features several important research notes on prison and sentencing. It is also our first edition that includes the Alternative to Academia (AltAc) corner to

highlight employment and mentoring opportunities and much more. Finally, our historian, Dan Butler, has written about his insightful conversations with current and former doctoral students. Each Division was asked by the Executive Director, Chris Eskridge, to designate a historian to record important moments. He will continue to develop this collection so please feel free to email Dan with ideas at [hdbutler@iastate.edu](mailto:hdbutler@iastate.edu).

As we look ahead, we are seeking nominations for our Executive Board. We will be electing a new Chair and two Executive Counselors. Please send your nominations (or self-nomination) to Ryan Labrecque at [rlabrecque@rti.org](mailto:rlabrecque@rti.org) by August 1st, 2023. We are also soliciting nominations for our many awards! Please visit <http://www.ascdcs.org/awards/> to learn more as these nominations are due August 31st, 2023.

As a reminder, the division is active across three social media platforms: Twitter (@ASC\_DCS), Facebook, and LinkedIn (just search ASC Division on Sentencing & Corrections). Please join us on each as we will utilize them to make announcements but also to highlight and showcase the accomplishments of our members. Please feel free to email Cassandra with requests, and her email is [catkinplunk@fau.edu](mailto:catkinplunk@fau.edu).



# Division Leadership



## Chair:

Shelley Johnson, University of North Carolina Charlotte  
[slistwan@uncc.edu](mailto:slistwan@uncc.edu) (2021-2023)

## Vice Chair:

Colleen Berryessa, Rutgers University  
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## Secretary/Treasury:

Kimberly Kras, San Diego State University  
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## Executive Counselors:

Cheryl Jonson, Xavier University  
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Cassandra Atkin-Plunk, Florida Atlantic University  
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Ryan Labrecque, Research Triangle Institute  
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## Past Chair:

Danielle S. Rudes, Sam Houston State University  
[drudes@shsu.edu](mailto:drudes@shsu.edu) (2019-2021)

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## Award Nominations Reminder



This a reminder that we will solicit nominations  
for our division awards in the summer!

Nomination deadlines will be August 31st, 2023

**Ben Steiner Excellence in Corrections Student Paper Award**

**Dissertation Scholarship Award**

**Distinguished New Scholar Award**

**Distinguished Scholar Award**

**Distinguished Service Award**

**Dr. Kimchi Memorial Graduate Travel Award**

**Edward J. Latessa Practitioner Research Award**

**Lifetime Achievement Award**

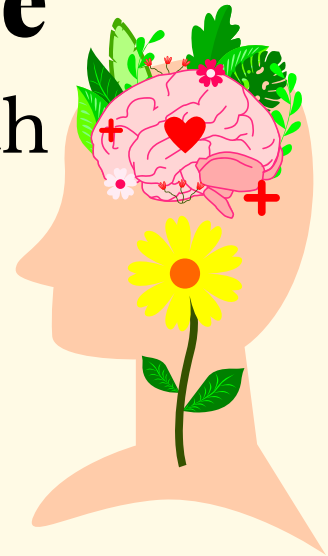
**Marguerite Q. Warren and Ted B. Palmer Differential Intervention Award**

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# Student Research Note

## Assessment of Mental Health Treatment in State Prisons by Race/Ethnicity and Age

By **Katlyn Fritz** ([kmc243@txstate.edu](mailto:kmc243@txstate.edu))  
**PhD Student**  
**School of Criminal Justice and Criminology**  
**Texas State University**



Past research has shown that mental illness and experiences of psychological distress are a growing concern in incarceration settings. While we know that mental illness affects a higher proportion of those incarcerated than the general population (Sayers et al., 2017; Metraux, 2008), there is still much to be learned about the use of treatment for mental illness in the correctional setting. There has also been limited research conducted regarding race and mental health in prisons, and almost all of the research that has been done has used samples that are exclusively Black persons and White persons. A recent study conducted by Fritz and Vaughan (2023) investigated psychological distress symptoms and mental health treatment usage among racial and ethnic groups, which included Latino and Multiracial groups.

Also missing from the literature is a discussion of how psychological distress symptoms and mental health treatment usage differ as incarcerated persons age. This gap was recently attempted to be filled in an article by Fritz (2023), which looked at symptoms of psychological distress, as well as treatment usage, by age. The following research note will summarize the results of these two articles and how they relate to mental health in state prisons, and what can be learned from their results.

Both studies used the Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016 (SPI), a nationally representative survey administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics to incarcerated persons in the United States. Research methods focused on the respondents from state correctional institutions. In Fritz and Vaughan (2023), the sample was 18,037 respondents who answered all relevant questions. The study looked at whether the respondent had participated in mental health treatment during their incarceration in state prison. Fritz (2023) separated respondents into two samples based on whether they had accessed counseling or prescription medication for mental health treatment since admission. The samples were then used to answer two research questions: (1) the effect of age on the frequency of self-reported psychological distress symptoms among those who have and have not received mental health support while incarcerated and (2) the effect of age on currently accessing mental health treatment.

Results of these two studies showed that Black respondents and Multiracial/Other respondents were around 15% more likely than White respondents to access mental health treatment in the sample (Fritz & Vaughan, 2023) and, as age increases, respondents are more likely to be currently accessing mental health treatment (Fritz, 2023). Even though as age increased so did use of treatment, Fritz (2023), also found that as time incarcerated increased, likelihood of accessing treatment decreased.

Much research surrounding race/ethnicity and mental health would suggest that White persons would be more likely to access mental health treatment than Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC, Koons-Witt & Crittenden, 2018), however the findings of the research presented here were the opposite. This could be due to several reasons. First, while BIPOC can experience bias and blocked access to treatment in the community, many barriers to treatment are removed in the incarceration setting. This includes cost of care, time off work, travel to providers, and availability of providers in one's area, etc. The remaining barriers are then cultural and personal stigmas surrounding mental health and treatment.

It is also possible that treatment may be required of some individuals incarcerated in state institutions, and the choice of whom to send to treatment may not always be racially neutral. BIPOC make up the majority of the prison population and prisons also have a higher percentage of PWMI than the general population (Primm et al., 2005). BIPOC with a mental illness may be at a greater risk of being required to undergo treatment. However, those voluntarily choosing to access mental health treatment should have the same opportunity as people of other races or ethnicities and also be able to feel that the provider is not culturally uninformed or biased. Mental health treatment can and should be supported and encouraged in ways that allow individuals of all backgrounds to feel comfortable reaching out for help when they need it.

There has been little research conducted surrounding the question of age and time in prison relating to mental health. The research conducted by Fritz (2023) suggests that more needs to be done to explore the intersection between age and time in prison. We know that there are many ways that an individual can find themselves to be older and incarcerated, from committing an offense in their elder years (be this their first time in prison or not) to committing an offense in their youth and growing old in prison; the experience is different. The results of Fritz (2023) suggest that while older individuals are more likely than younger individuals to access treatment, they are more likely to access it in their first years of incarceration. This is something that needs to be addressed.

If all incarcerated persons are more likely to access mental health treatment in their first years of incarceration, the question becomes, why? Are they more likely to be screened and told of resources in their first few years? Are they more willing to participate in their first few years? At what point do they stop participating? How do we encourage more participation in later years from individuals serving life sentences? These are all important questions to be addressed with more research, especially qualitatively, in the future.

Overall, the recent additions to the research in mental health treatment show that there is much we are doing to improve the experiences of those with SMI in state prisons, but there is also much still to be done.

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Sayers, S. K., Domino, M. E., Cuddeback, G. S., Barrett, N. J., & Morrissey, J. P. (2017). Connecting mentally ill detainees in large urban jails with community care. *The Psychiatric Quarterly*, 88(2), 323–333. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-016-9449-8>



# AltAc Corner

We are excited to announce the inaugural AltAc or "Alternatives to Academia" Corner! This new section will be a space for all things AltAc. It will cover everything from navigating the AltAc job market, common myths about AltAc careers, AltAc mentoring, and so much more.

## BEHIND THE ALTAC CAREERS SERIES: MEET THE DYNAMIC DUO THAT STARTED IT ALL

In this first ever AltAc Corner, we decided it was important to highlight the tremendous work and accomplishments of the original creators of the AltAc series. We will introduce you to Shannon and Kate and talk with Shannon about how the series got its start, challenges to doing this work, and the successes she's seen so far.

**Shannon** (she/her) earned her Ph.D. in Criminology, Law and Society from George Mason University. She has 5+ years of experience conducting rigorous research; providing evidence-informed technical assistance to local, state, and federal partners; and developing creative and research-based training curriculum for practitioners. She is dedicated to researching and implementing evidence-informed and culturally responsive policies and practices in legal systems. Importantly, her work centers on the humane and dignified care of people who make contact with the legal system.



**Shannon Magnuson, PhD**  
Senior Associate  
Justice System Partners (JSP)



**Katherine Ginsburg Kempany, PhD**  
Research Scientist  
Research Operations Manager  
Oregon Department of Corrections



**Katherine** (she/her) earned her Ph.D. in Criminology & Criminal Justice from Arizona State University. She has a wealth of experience and is a subject matter expert in correctional officer stress and wellness. She works to elevate the quality of research that occurs within criminal justice agencies by providing actionable information to policy and decision-makers. Wholeheartedly embracing her identity as an “agency academic” and social scientist, she operates under the professional mission (and dream) that her work will improve the lives of those who live and work within the criminal legal system.

### ***Why was it important for you to start the AltAc series?***

When I started a GRA outside of my university, I began to feel incredibly disconnected from my mentors and department. Rarely did folks check in on me or ask how they could support me. I think they mostly expected me to figure it out because I'm known for being resourceful. Sometimes, though, it's nice to not have to figure it out yourself or navigate the hard things alone. I began to work hard to cultivate relationships and build networks, and I learned how to move in AltAc spaces. A few people outside of my university were indispensable for me harnessing my power, evaluating my monetary worth, and learning how to advocate for myself on the market. I felt like I wanted to bottle up what they did for me and give it to other people. I wanted to help make it easier for other people and build a community; no one wants to do the hard stuff alone.

### ***What has been your favorite part of doing the AltAc series?***

Over the past few years, multiple people have let us know that our advice or guidance helped them score a job or AltAc fellowship. It's rewarding to know we're doing our small part in making it easier for folks to find a workplace they love and do work they're passionate about. I also do a lot of one-on-one meetings to help people get their materials prepared for the market. It's rewarding to hear the relief in people's voices when they start figuring it out, and realizing they're going to shine on the market.

### ***What has been the hardest part of doing the AltAc series?***

There is a hard reality in the academy: there are fewer jobs than there are graduates. Helping people understand the world of possibilities is not a nice-to-have in departments but rather a need-to-have. There has been some faculty push-back against this series, or faculty feeling as though they share no responsibility in learning about AltAc career spaces. However, I think this perspective is changing, and faculty are learning more about these spaces in order to be better mentors.

### ***What would you say has been the greatest accomplishment of the AltAc series so far?***

The greatest accomplishment of the AltAc series is really the evolution of it as a key resource for both students and faculty. The AltAc series features so many rockstar researchers who have all agreed to be resources to students. It's a built-in network, and no longer do people have to navigate to AltAc spaces alone.



## **ADVICE**

FOR PhDs  
LOOKING TO ENTER  
ALTAC SPACES:

**"STOP LOOKING  
FOR THE JOB  
YOUR  
DEPARTMENT  
WANTS FOR  
YOU AND LOOK  
FOR THE JOB  
THAT YOU  
WANT FOR  
YOU."**

**- Shannon  
Magnuson**

# MYTH *Busting*

*myth*

*Reality*

**In AltAc careers, you can't design your own research or do rigorous research.**

1

AltAc researchers design and lead rigorous research all the time! They use the same research methods and analyses that Academics use, but in applied settings. Some AltAc jobs even encourage researchers to engage in their own projects.

**In AltAc careers, you don't publish, so you can't stay relevant.**

2

Publishing academic articles is not the only way to "stay relevant." In fact, many AltAc researchers write technical reports, white papers, and policy briefs that are published and incredibly important to the justice community.

**If you start in an AltAc career, you can't ever teach or have a tenure-track position at a university**

3

A lot of PhDs, even if they work in AltAc, adjunct teach at universities or colleges, and some eventually transition back to, or into academic positions.

**If you get a PhD in Criminal Justice or Criminology (CJC), you can't work in another discipline.**

4

Many PhDs in CJC work in other disciplines like public health, information technology, finance, and more. You're not pigeon-holed by your degree!



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Resources**



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# Research Note

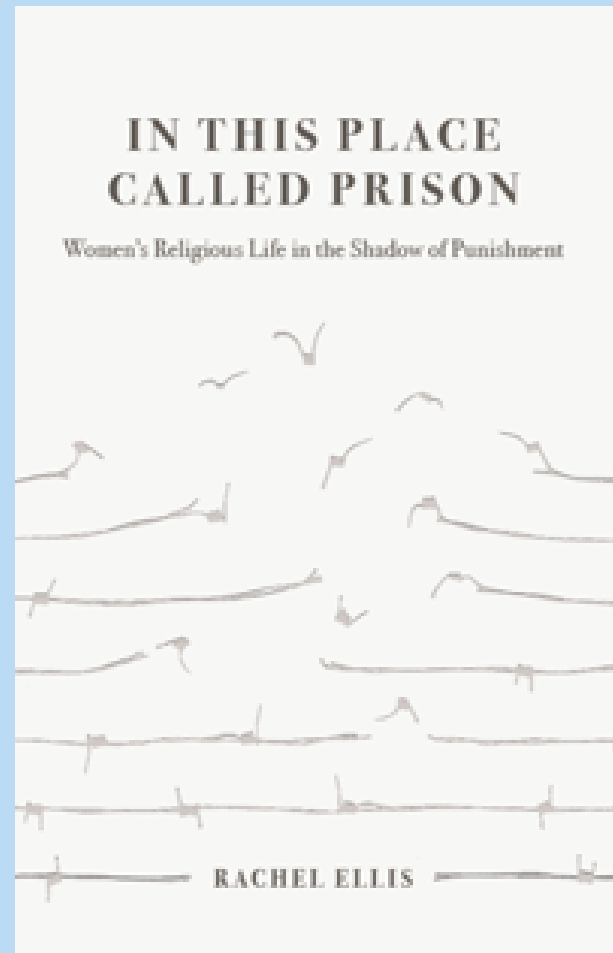
## In This Place Called Prison

**By Rachel Ellis, PhD ([ellisr@umd.edu](mailto:ellisr@umd.edu))**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**Department of Criminology and**  
**Criminal Justice**  
**University of Maryland**

“I don’t want you to think that we are consumed by this,” Asabi said, her voice resounding against the cavernous room cast in concrete, “We are free.” She paused. “We are grateful for the freedom that God has allowed in this place called prison.”

“I don’t want you to think that we are consumed by this,” Asabi said, her voice resounding against the cavernous room cast in concrete, “We are free.” She paused. “We are grateful for the freedom that God has allowed in this place called prison.”

Asabi is one of the women I met during the 12 months I spent conducting research inside a U.S. state women’s prison. Now in her mid-30s, Asabi has spent nearly half her life in prison. “I grew up in here,” she motioned, her upright posture making her look taller than her 5’2” frame. Religion has powerfully transformed Asabi’s life behind bars. Throughout her sentence, Asabi experimented until she found a religion that felt right. She said that now, as a devout Baptist, she believes that forgiveness and salvation come from accepting Jesus Christ as Lord. “It’s been a process,” she conceded, “but now I can say I am finally free. I know the only thing I can’t do is walk out



that gate.” Asabi gestured towards the towering gates wrapped in razor wire that kept her locked in. In a cold, sterile room inside a crowded prison, not one moment unguarded, Asabi spoke words I would hear repeatedly throughout my year of ethnographic fieldwork, spent observing and interviewing women at Mapleside Prison: she cared deeply about “making something out of her incarceration.” Her Christian faith would be the way to achieve this goal.

The practical and narrative ways Asabi drew on religion to make sense of her time in prison constitute one of many stories featured in my new book *In This Place Called Prison: Women's Religious Life in the Shadow of Punishment* (University of California Press, 2023). Although prison is marked by control—from rules and routines to mandatory labor and monitored visits—for many, religion offers a way out. Whereas prison officials promote retributive narratives of responsibility and deservingness, religious teachings offer forgiveness and redemption.

Based on a year of observations and interviews with incarcerated women, staff, and volunteers, the book shows how women draw on religion to navigate their lived experiences of carceral control. Historians tell us that religion has long been entwined with punishment in the United States. Despite what we might imagine given the constitutional emphasis on the separation of church and state, religious practice is not peripheral to the carceral experience but rather embedded in the very foundation of North American prisons as we know them today. Tracing religious leaders’ historical role in prison reform up to the religious freedom legislation that prevails today, I examine how religion collides and colludes with the state in an enduring tension between freedom and constraint. This book speaks to the quest for dignity and light against the backdrop of mass incarceration, gendered state surveillance, and American inequality.

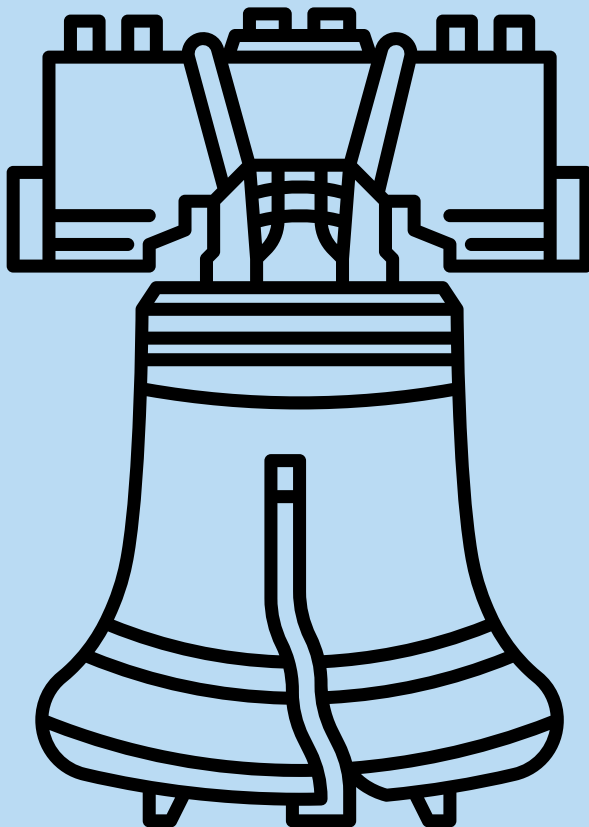
The book may be of interest to students in Corrections, Gender and Crime, Punishment and Inequality, and Qualitative Methods classes. An extended methodological appendix discusses the challenges of prison as a hard-to-reach field site and grapples with the ethics of conducting prison research. All of the proceeds I earn from this printing are donated to nonprofit organizations that directly help women in prison and women returning home from prison.

## References

Ellis, R. (2023). *In This Place Called Prison: Women's Religious Life in the Shadow of Punishment*. University of California Press.

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# Upcoming ASC Meeting: **See you in November!**



**Philadelphia**  
**2023**



# Taking Note: Current and Former Doctoral Student Experiences and Insights

**H. Daniel Butler, PhD ([hdbutler@iastate.edu](mailto:hdbutler@iastate.edu))**  
**Assistant Professor, Iowa State University**

Colleagues,

As Historian, one of my tasks is to record important moments in the history of our Division. In this entry, I am documenting experiences and insights from current and former graduate students. The goal of this entry is to provide a time capsule highlighting the varied research interests of students in addition to understanding the most pressing problems graduate students experience. It will be interesting to compare the responses provided here with a new interview conducted years from now. Each of the participants in this interview graciously agreed to a brief virtual interview. I transcribed their responses and paraphrased them when necessary. As you will see, the doctoral students interviewed for this entry are each at different stages of program completion, which ideally provides a greater representation of the graduate student experience. The students who participated in this interview deserve special thanks and recognition:

- LaQuana Askew, Old Dominion University, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, 2nd Year PhD
- Iman Said, Google, Recent PhD Graduate of Pennsylvania State University, Department of Sociology and Criminology
- Jazmin Palacios, Sam Houston State University, College of Criminal Justice, 3rd Year PhD
- Caitlin Bauer, Sam Houston State University, College of Criminal Justice, 1st Year PhD
- Anthony Azari, Rutgers University, School of Criminal Justice, 4th Year PhD

Thank you!

*H. Daniel Butler*

### ***What is your primary area of research interest?***

**LaQuana Askew:** Drug courts and evaluation research with an interest in examining racial disparities from a critical perspective. This effort includes examining the experiences of underrepresented groups in drug treatment courts who may experience greater barriers to successful court completion.

**Iman Said:** Two primary areas that include religiosity and prison and also perceptions of law enforcement bias. Religion may provide a helpful avenue for individuals to adjust to prison in addition to increasing successful community reentry. Iman's dissertation examined police behavior during protests and whether that behavior is racially biased.

**Jazmin Palacios:** Legal analysis of the corrections system that includes incarcerated persons' litigation and the outcomes of that litigation. This is an important topic to study because it informs correctional practice and decision making.

**Caitlin Bauer:** Corrections and gender with an emphasis on understanding how women enter the criminal justice system and navigate the prison experience.

**Anthony Azari:** Corrections and reentry that includes problem-solving courts and understanding the impacts of sentencing reform. He also is interested in reforms tied to modern-day correctional practices and the various efforts toward policy reform within this space.

### ***What are your aspirations after graduation?***

**LaQuana Askew:** LaQuana is currently focused on completing her PhD, but she wants to become a tenured professor. She enjoys working on the applied side of research and developing strong collaborations with practitioners.

**Iman Said:** Iman already achieved one career aspiration by accepting a job at Google (congratulations!). Iman loves academia, teaching, and research, but she acknowledges that there are problems with the treatment of women of color in academia. During graduate school, Iman realized she had a few opportunities prior to graduation to explore alt-academia jobs. She applied to several internships within the tech field, and she accepted the internship at Google. Once there, Iman really enjoyed the collaborative environment and



working with people who have diverse backgrounds, education, and life experiences that are similar to her own.

***What are the greatest issues facing graduate students today?***

**Iman Said:** One major problem is the declining job marketability for graduate students. It is harder and harder for a top student on the job market that would justify earning a PhD. For instance, some jobs require a PhD when a master's degree would be sufficient. There needs to be a good faith effort in broadening what it means to get a job after a PhD. Universities need to prepare students for that reality while also dedicating resources to continue helping them be marketable inside and outside of academia.

**Jazmin Palacios:** There is no roadmap for being successful in graduate school outside of informal conversations with other students or faculty. It would be helpful if this information was better communicated to students aside from pressuring students to actively publish. One area that has helped Jazmin navigate academia is the guidance and mentorship provided by faculty in her program.

**Caitlin Bauer:** Caitlin states that money is one of the greatest issues facing graduate students today. It is difficult to manage expenses with the cost of living on a graduate student stipend. Stress management is another concern and establishing a healthy work-life balance. As an example, whenever Caitlin is not doing something for work/school she experiences feelings of guilt. Taking time off does not always feel enjoyable.

**Anthony Azari:** University and community support to conduct and collect original research often requires overcoming several barriers. One barrier includes the various budget cuts to higher education. Budget constraints may mean that universities are increasingly unwilling to support students in their endeavors toward higher education. This limited funding is also exasperated by political attacks on higher education today. States are unwilling to support these financial investments and the burden is then placed on students and universities. Graduate student education is very valuable and funding scarcity means fewer scholars in the field and less quality graduate education programs.

## ***How can the Division of Corrections and Sentencing best help you in achieving your career goals?***

**LaQuana Askew:** The mentorship program offered by DCS sounds fantastic. The opportunity to be connected with someone who has experience in the field and be offered guidance and advice is really important. While it is helpful to have mentorship at your own university, it is just as important to receive feedback from individuals who have an outsider perspective. One area that can be improved is advertising DCS to graduate students through social media. Outside of faculty interaction, LaQuana would not be too familiar with DCS.

**Iman Said:** In Iman's first year of graduate school, she was not familiar with DCS. It was her interactions with her advisor that made her aware DCS was worth joining, being involved in, and volunteering her time. Later in her graduate program, DCS newsletters provided Iman with ideas about resources, career paths, and newsletters that proved very beneficial. DCS was most straightforward about involvement and that there are several opportunities to be involved. One area that may be considered for improvement is identifying a way for a master's level student or other new graduate students to learn about DCS and its importance even earlier.

**Jazmin Palacios:** Jazmin really likes the idea of scholarships and mentorship programs. Conferences are expensive, so travel funding opportunities would be helpful. A mentorship program sounds appealing because it provides an opportunity to network and meet people you would not otherwise meet in your program.

**Anthony Azari:** DCS has had a longstanding mission to make positive policy impacts through the work of its various members. DCS can continue to support the work of its various members and provide research and publication opportunities for the many affiliated members. Also, DCS should support endeavors to bring researchers and practitioners together. DCS is one of the few opportunities where such connections can be made. By bringing researchers and practitioners together, research opportunities can blossom making lasting reform possible. Lastly, DCS should continue to support the annual breakfast and possibly build upon it. These networking opportunities are invaluable as research is shared and connections are built.

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# Research Note

## Why We Should Start Thinking Spatially About Sentencing



**By Emerson Waite, MA**

**Graduate Student, The Pennsylvania State University**

**Kelsey L. Kramer, MS ([kelsey\\_kramer@cl.hctx.net](mailto:kelsey_kramer@cl.hctx.net))**

**Research Analyst, Harris County Courts Office of Court Management**

According to Logan (2012), spatial thinking refers to where things are or where they happen, and specifically about where they happen in relation to other things. In an earlier writing, Logan and colleagues (2010) explain that there are processes occurring in one place that are influenced by what is happening in its neighboring jurisdiction. To be sure, spatial analyses are not new. In fact, spatial analyses have been used for decades in crime and place literature. Famously, Sampson and colleagues (1997) used spatial analysis and found that levels of collective efficacy in one neighborhood had an impact on crime in other nearby neighborhoods. Kreager and colleagues (2011) also used a spatial approach to study the effects of gentrification on crime in Seattle. They found that proximity to revitalizing areas (i.e., areas of transition) had higher levels of crime. Spatial methods have also often been applied in policing studies on crime hot spots (e.g., Gullion et al., 2022; Haberman, 2017). Despite the prevalence of spatial thinking and methods in criminology more generally, sentencing scholars have not fully realized their potential.

We do, however, want to highlight Ulmer's (1997) book, *Social Worlds of Sentencing*, because it provides initial evidence that

spatial thinking and methods are applicable to sentencing research. For example, Ulmer (1997) writes:

*These [harsher] sentencing standards were especially directed toward the goal of deterring so-called criminal elements from the nearby metropolis from entering the county and preying on its residents and upscale shopping districts (p. 119).*

*I think that Rich County, especially the courts and the DA's office, has always considered itself as being tough on crime. They see the city nearby as being lighter in sentencing, so it is up to Rich County to teach them all a lesson. (p. 119).*

*Both of these quotes demonstrate that court actors do consider the ongoing social processes in neighboring jurisdictions when determining their approach to sentencing. Thus, incorporating a spatial component is a logical and important next step.*

*So, we outline several reasons why incorporating spatial techniques in sentencing research may be useful.*

## **1. Court jurisdictions are embedded in larger spatial contexts.**

Existing sentencing research looking at community characteristics hypothesize that judges are socialized according to the attributes of the jurisdiction in which they live and work (e.g., Britt 2000; Fearn 2005; Johnson 2005; Ulmer & Johnson 2004). However, people are exposed to media, and may travel between jurisdictions, so ideas can spread which creates the opportunity for judges to be socialized and influenced by factors outside of their home jurisdiction. For example, judges and other court actors may attend conferences where they meet and interact with one another and share ideas. Thus, community context is not bound solely to one jurisdiction. Using spatial techniques allows researchers to understand how a judge's decisions vary based on their proximity to, and the characteristics of, neighboring jurisdictions.

## **2. Traditional multilevel models cannot account for spatial relationships.**

Multilevel models look at jurisdictions as islands and don't consider how the larger geographic context in which they are embedded influences the dynamics between jurisdiction characteristics and sentencing outcomes. For example, many contextual sentencing studies predict that political context will have an impact on a variety of sentencing outcomes but there are mixed results about its effect (Fearn 2005; Johnson 2005; Ulmer & Johnson 2004). Thinking about sentencing at the county level, a spatial perspective would not only ask about the political orientation of a county, but also, 1) what does the political context of the neighboring counties look like, 2) how are they similar or different, and 3) what is the relationship of the political context between a place and its neighboring jurisdictions? It may be true that a conservative county that neighbors other conservative counties sentence differently than a conservative county with neighbors that are more liberal.

For example, Waite (2022) compares a standard multilevel model to a spatial model and finds that the multilevel model did not show any statistically significant effect on a county's level of conservatism. Using spatial econometrics, however, Waite (2022) finds that as a county becomes more conservative, relative to its neighbors, defendants have greater odds of being incarcerated. The same analysis showed that as a county's neighbors become more conservative, defendants sentenced in the focal county, which is less conservative, were less likely to be incarcerated. Thus, incorporating spatial techniques like Moran's I, or Local Indicators of Spatial Association (LISA) maps (see Waite, 2022), gives researchers the ability to obtain these answers.

## **3. Spatial maps can be a useful tool in the quest for fair and equitable sentencing practices.**

Spatial maps also offer a simple yet effective way to geographically

pinpoint where disparities are occurring. For example, Kramer and colleagues (forthcoming) use U.S. Sentencing Commission data to map the geographic distribution of racial and ethnic disparities to identify specific district courts that have the highest and lowest levels of disparities and determine if “hot spots” of disparity exist. They argue that mapping racial and ethnic disparities can provide criminal justice actors with a visual depiction of where disparities concentrate (or do not) and can help create more targeted reform efforts. Thus, spatial techniques can inform discussions on the fairness and equity of policies and practices.

Overall, spatial thinking allows sentencing scholars to better understand variation in sentencing decisions and can be an effective tool to help reduce disparities. Therefore, we invite other sentencing scholars to incorporate spatial techniques, as we believe this is a necessary next step to advance research, assist judges and other courtroom actors in decision-making, and influence policies in order to create a more equitable justice system.

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# Book Announcement



## Art of the Con (3rd edition)



(pictured are Gary Cornelius (left) and Kevin Courtright)

Gary Cornelius, an Edinboro University alum, and Dr. Kevin Courtright, of the criminal justice department at PennWest University at Edinboro, are teaming up to produce a 3rd edition of the very popular book, *The Art of the Con: Avoiding Offender Manipulation*, for the American Correctional Association (ACA). Work on the revision began in the spring of 2023. The first two editions of the book were authored by Cornelius.

### Author Biographies

**Lt. Gary F. Cornelius** retired in 2005 from the Fairfax County (VA) Office of the Sheriff, after serving over 27 years in the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center. His prior service in law enforcement included service in the United States Secret Service Uniformed Division. His jail career included assignments in confinement, work release, programs and classification. He has been an adjunct faculty member of the Criminology, Law and Society Department at George Mason University from 1986 to 2018, where he taught several courses. He is also the author of several books, book chapters, and blogs and is a very proud alum and tireless supporter of Edinboro University.

**Dr. Kevin E. Courtright** is an associate professor of criminal justice at PennWest University at Edinboro. He earned his Ph.D. in criminology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 1995. Prior to obtaining his Ph.D., he worked as a probation officer in New York State in Chautauqua County. Previous publications include several book chapters and articles appearing in the *Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *Federal Probation*, *The Criminologist*, the *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, *The Prison Journal*, *Corrections Compendium*, and *Criminal Justice Studies*. He was a grant award recipient of, and principal investigator for, the “Prisons and Rural Communities” study funded by The Center for Rural Pennsylvania. Prior to joining the State System of Higher Education in Pennsylvania, he taught at Hilbert College and Niagara University in western New York. In 2007, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania (EUP) honored him with the “Researcher of the Year” award and in 2021 EUP presented him with the “Faculty of the Year” award.



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# Research Note

## Building a Better Risk Assessment Algorithm: An RTI-Georgia Department of Community Supervision Undertaking

**By Pamela K. Lattimore, PhD ([lattimore@rti.org](mailto:lattimore@rti.org))**  
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With support from the National Institute of Justice, researchers at RTI International have been working with research and operations staff of the Georgia Department of Community Supervision (DCS) to develop a new set of risk algorithms to predict the probability of felony or violent-misdemeanor arrests for individuals on probation or parole. The Integrated Dynamic Risk Assessment for Community Supervision (IDRACS) project has multiple objectives, including testing artificial intelligence/machine learning (AI/ML) algorithms against traditional statistical models, incorporating dynamic factors into risk models, identifying factors predictive of increasing and decreasing risk, and incorporating uncertainty into predictions of rearrest. The project has involved a collaborative approach between RTI and GDCS throughout the algorithm development and integration stages. Algorithm development included initial focus groups with officers and managers to gather information on attitudes towards the current algorithms and “wants” for a new risk-

scoring algorithm. Integration included regular working group meetings with DCS staff to incorporate factor development and model scoring programs into the DCS computer systems to output daily risk scores to the Portal through which community supervision officers access information about their caseloads.

As those who have undertaken similar efforts know, the initial data acquisition and processing step can be formidable. DCS initially provided multiple tables extracted from their self-created case management system, the Georgia Reentry Web Portal. The shared records contained information on all individuals on community supervision in Georgia between January 1, 2016, and May 31, 2020, including prison data from the Georgia Department of Corrections for those with an incarceration history. We also developed arrest history scores and identified recidivism outcomes using arrest data from the Georgia Crime Information Center. Combining all collected data, we generated separate risk models for probation, parole, and split probation for male and female individuals. Various statistical and AI/ML methods were applied to these data to predict felony or violent misdemeanor arrests. Ultimately, sets of logistical regression models were determined to provide equal predictive accuracy (measured by Area Under the Curve, AUC) with the added benefit of transparency for risk factors and probability calculations.

These models incorporate several features that distinguish them from similar risk models, including (1) time-specific criminal history, (2) dynamic risk and protective factors, (3) time-specific risk periods for modeling arrest, and (4) the incorporation of uncertainty into the resulting predicted probability. When examining the utility of different recall periods for criminal history, we found that 2-year or 5-year arrest history scores (depending on the model), compared to longer histories, were determined to be sufficient and, in some cases, better (i.e., no loss of predictive accuracy over the inclusion of longer criminal histories). In addition, we coded arrests into broad categories using the National Corrections Reporting Program classification system to increase precision by incorporating relevant

information about the charges. Beyond static criminal history measures, we also integrated a few dynamic measures observed throughout supervision. For example, both positive and negative drug test results were predictive (positive tests increased risk; negative tests reduced risk) and including information on whether a drug test occurred in the previous 90 days also reduced risk in some models. Dynamic employment measures were protective, but after a certain point, employment data were no longer current and thus unusable for individuals on supervision for sustained periods. Furthermore, these models included counts for different types of non-violent misdemeanor arrests that occurred during supervision and did not result in a revocation but were predictive of future felony or violent misdemeanor arrests.

In addition to including dynamic factors, these models were developed for specific time periods to accommodate the risk of arrest for individuals who remain on supervision for different periods. Separate models were estimated for the initial 90-day supervision period (consistent with Georgia's practice of frontloading services during the first 90 days), the next 270 days (i.e., roughly the first year of supervision), and greater than 360 days. The different temporal models reflect supervision practice (e.g., greater surveillance and resource linkage during the initial 90 days of supervision) and changes in the risk context and population over time. Criminal history measures predicted rearrest during the first 90-day models but were less impactful in models that reflected more time on supervision without an arrest. Lastly, we use a bootstrapping process to generate a distribution of predicted rearrest probabilities for each person, allowing us to create a confidence interval around our mean estimate to distinguish individuals who are most likely to re-offend from those who require less attention while also highlighting cases requiring more scrutiny based on the uncertainty in the prediction. The next step is to complete the integration of the models into the DCS system, work with an operations group to ensure that model applications match practice, and design how to display the data for officers, managers, and higher leadership—a step

that will be completed in the Summer of 2023. A small exploratory task to analyze a sample of body-worn camera audio from officer-supervisee interactions is also underway. To our knowledge, this will be the first assessment of the nature of the content of interactions (e.g., tone, conversation balance, length, etc.) between officers and supervisees. The goal is to examine whether there are key elements in the exchanges that may prove useful in understanding risk.

As a result of this successful project, RTI is now working with DCS to assess the impact of recent probation reform legislation in Georgia. Arnold Ventures funds this work as part of a multi-state examination of state probation reform. Georgia has the largest probation population per capita in the United States partly because the average length of supervision is more than three times the national average. The Georgia legislature passed legislation in 2017 (SB 174) and again in 2021 (SB 105) to provide for early discharge from probation either at a behavioral incentive date or after three years on probation assuming certain conditions are met and excluding certain offenses. This impact analysis will determine the new legislation's effect on individuals, officer caseloads, and public safety.

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## From the Editor



I am very happy to be editing my first DCS newsletter as Vice Chair—and I was especially pleased to have so much great division-related research to highlight in my first issue! I really appreciated that division members came out in full force to respond to my call for submissions (I had too many submissions for this issue!). And I am happy that we are able to provide the first of many AltAc Corners in this newsletter. Please keep all of these great notes and other contributions coming in for the Fall newsletter! We will be highlighting division award winners and what to look forward to at the ASC meeting in the next issue. Until then, thank you for all the support and I will see everyone in the Fall newsletter, and then of course, in Philadelphia!



**Colleen Berryessa**  
**DCS Vice Chair**