Analyzing Contemporary Introductory Textbooks on Correctional Administration/Management/ Organization: A Content Analysis

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BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

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This book review essay discusses and analyzes how introductory textbooks on correctional administration, written primarily for the American university market, frame the discourse on this subject matter. The writer presents both quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence of coverage given to prison administration. In addition to traditional content analysis methods, the authors of these books were contacted and asked to explain the decision-making processes they used for content inclusion, exclusion and/or minimization. The paper concludes with a handful of recommendations on improving texts in this subdiscipline.

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, a steady amount of American-based scholarly research on correctional management, leadership, organizations and administration has been produced (e.g. Cullen et al. 1993a, b; Fleisher, 1996, 1997; Fabelo, 1997; Heater, 2000; Henderson et al., 2000; Ohimark et al., 2000; Reisig & Lovrich, 1998; Riveland, 1997; Stinchcomb, 1998, 1999; Slate & Vogel, 1997; Wright et al., 1997). There are at least four reasons for this increase: the availability of an avenue for the publication of such literature—the journal Corrections Management Quarterly, the exponential growth in the number of people being sentenced to jails and prisons over the last 15 years, the building of new correctional facilities across the country and the consequent increase in the amount of resources budgeted for correctional systems in the United States over the same time period (Ross, 2008, chapter 1). These realities and trends have raised another issue that has received less attention, and that is the need to adequately train individuals to manage and lead these facilities.
The training of professionals to properly and effectively manage and lead correctional institutions inevitably takes place both on the tiers and cell blocks of correctional facilities and in the classroom. On-the-job training gives correctional administrators the opportunity to learn to deal with different situations that might arise unexpectedly and develop a repertoire of problem-solving strategies. On-the-job training also facilitates mentoring by superiors, who will hopefully adequately supervise, support and mentor correctional managers and leaders, and thereby pass on the appropriate career-relevant knowledge and techniques. In addition to on-the-job training, it is recognized that formal education in the classroom setting is essential for training effective correctional managers and leaders. Students and instructors in college- and university-based criminal justice programs and state correctional training facilities need relevant and high-quality learning materials to help them understand the field of corrections and prepare for careers in this field. Many of these classes are taught using existing college-level textbooks. In the field of correctional administration, however, only a handful of textbook authors and publishers have tried to capitalize on the demand for correctional administration field specific textbooks. Thus an in-depth examination of the leading textbooks on correctional administration is called for to determine the quality and nature of information that is emphasized, minimized and/or omitted, as well as examining the pedagogical approaches that are promoted. More importantly, there is a need to understand whether existing textbooks on correctional administration provide information that is evidence-based rather than anecdotal. This latter issue has important implications for practitioners, researchers, instructors, students and policymakers.

The Importance of Textbooks

Textbooks serve various functions; one of the most crucial is framing and interpreting the discussion of important academic disciplines by defining the boundaries for the inclusion and exclusion of appropriate discourse. This can have significant ramifications on not only students, instructors and scholars, but also practitioners, editors, publishers and the field of criminology/criminal justice as a whole.

Introductory textbooks are tools that often serve as the first exposure students receive to any given subject matter. Selecting a particular text for use in class is typically a personal pedagogical decision made by the individual instructor. True, some professors may eschew a traditional text and instead mix and match from a variety of scholarly books like Dilulio's *Governing Prisons* (1987) or popular (trade) books such as Conover's *Newjack* (2001), but many still prefer to use a textbook of some kind.

There is considerable competition in the American criminology/criminal justice textbook market. Predictably, there are more texts at the introductory level (e.g. intro to criminology/criminal justice texts). As one narrows down the general field to specialties including corrections, policing, and juvenile justice,
there is even less choice. Considerably fewer options for texts exist in subspecialties like law enforcement administration, offender rehabilitation and prison administration.

Undoubtedly, the majority of textbooks produced for the American criminology/criminal justice market focus on "mainstream" topics such as street crime; thus, one would be unlikely to find correctional administration texts that advocate system reform. Unlike other topics in criminology/criminal justice (e.g. state crime, crimes against the environment, etc.), the topic of correctional administration is not subject to issues of legitimacy among practitioners. Therefore, this article reviews correctional administration texts to shed more light on their content and goals—namely, what they emphasize and what they omit.

Content Analysis of Textbooks

Over the past two decades, criminologists have explored the basic content of introductory textbooks in the fields of criminology and criminal justice (e.g. Arrigo, 1999; Tunnell, 1993; Wagner, 2006; Wright, 2000; Wozniak, 2001; Wright & Schreck, 2000). Predictably, certain topics in the criminology/criminal justice curriculum—such as street crime—are emphasized, while others are minimized and/or neglected.

This research builds upon a previous study conducted by the author and a colleague (Rothe & Ross, 2008) that explored the marginalization of state crime within criminology textbooks, and also takes a similar approach.

Method

To conduct this study, the investigator performed four basic tasks: identifying the leading and current introductory correctional administration texts; reading and/or skimming these books; performing a content analysis, which provided quantitative descriptive statistics; and surveying the author/s of the leading and current introductory correctional administration texts.

Identifying the Leading and Current Introductory Correctional Administration Texts

To determine the bestselling texts, the writer examined recent www.amazon.com sales rankings, recognizing that this method is an imperfect indicator for this kind of data, and then compared these results with those of other web sites that also sell college textbooks. The results found at www.ecampus.com and www.alibris.com confirmed that the findings from Amazon were reflective of classroom sales.

Given the small universe of texts in this area, the investigator considered contacting textbook sales representatives to identify their leading prison
administration textbooks and their largest competitors, and then comparing these findings with those from Amazon, alibris and e-campus. This approach was ignored because few textbook publishers offered more than one corrections administration text. Had the number of textbooks on the market been larger, a more thorough examination would have been warranted.

The leading and current introductory correctional administration texts were quickly identified, as only about five correctional management or organization texts are in print (Freeman, 1999; Seiter, 2002; Stojkovic & Farkas, 2003; Phillips & McConnell, 2005; Carlson & Garrett 2007—see Appendix A).¹ One anthology (Carlson & Garrett, 2007), also known as a "reader", exists in this subject area. On the surface, the correctional administration texts range in publication dates from 1999 to 2007, vary in length from 168 to 528 pages, and range in retail price from $59.95 to $84.95 (U.S.).

More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that—based on Amazon’s sales rankings—Phillips and McConnell’s *The Effective Corrections Manager* posted the highest sales figures, with a ranking of 472,861 (Appendix B).²

Reading the Books to Determine Basic Issues

The texts were read in order to answer the following five questions:

1. Does the book mention the new penology and/or managerialism?
2. Does the subject matter covered by the text reflect and/or integrate the current correctional management literature?
3. To what degree does the book cite current scholarly literature?
4. In terms of pedagogy, does the book include exhibit boxes?
5. Does the book include exercises for readers?

Perform a Content Analysis to Obtain Quantitative Descriptive Statistics

To accomplish this task, the investigator performed a content analysis (e.g. Krippendorf, 1981) of the top-selling correctional administration textbooks to provide quantitative and qualitative descriptions of the subject matter within. Although other studies (see Wagner 2006) have operationalized coverage by centimeters of print, the utility of this kind of metric can be questioned because of the differences in font type among the various publishers. Short of converting each text to the same font, the most effective means of determining the extent to which each subject matter was covered proved to be reading through the

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¹ Excluded from this analysis is Cripe and Claire (2004). *Legal aspects of corrections management*. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett (2nd edn). This book is a more specialized treatment than the others and thus it was not included in the analysis.

² Future iterations of this analysis might look at the combined effects of year of publication, length and price on sales ranking. For the time being, though, this is not perceived as a high-priority issue.
chapter titles (and content where necessary) and establishing a percentage of the total number of pages devoted to a particular subject. The formula of dividing the number of pages devoted to a topic by the total number of pages in the book proved to be useful for this task. Admittedly, this method did not alleviate the problems of different fonts, half pages, exhibit boxes, photographs, etc.; however, what should immediately become apparent is that we should call into question a purely quantitative approach to answering the following questions:

1. What particular content does the text cover?
2. If so, how much coverage is given?
3. Is there a particular theoretical approach, theme or orientation utilized throughout the book?

Surveying the Author/s of the Leading and Current Introductory Correctional Administration Texts

In an attempt to better understand the dynamics surrounding these texts, the investigator sent brief e-mail questionnaires to their authors (Appendix C). For books with multiple authors, the researcher targeted correspondence to the textbook writer he personally knew or knew of best. Only four of the five book authors responded. The individual who chose not to respond might have assumed the investigator e-mailed him or her with the intention of “stealing” his or her ideas, since the researcher might have thought the writer wanted to write an introductory corrections management text himself, or perhaps that author was embarrassed about his or her book’s questionable success. In the case of multiple authored texts, once one of the two authors of a book responded, a similar questionnaire was e-mailed to the other author. Despite this extra step, none of the co-authors responded.

Findings

The following section reviews the textbook descriptions of each book, basic item analysis, results from the content analysis and responses by the authors.

Textual Descriptions of Each Book

Freeman’s *Correctional Organization and Management* (1999) emphasizes the history and theory of its subject matter. A considerable amount of what the author presents is supported by research derived from scholarly literature on prison management. This text includes black-and-white photographs, diagrams, charts, exhibit boxes and exercises. Unfortunately, this text is comparatively outdated. Similarly, Seiter’s *Correctional Administration: Integrating Theory and Practice* (2002) is a relatively comprehensive treatment of the subject. In many
respects, the content resembles an introduction to corrections textbook, but it also includes material on management and administration. The text has some black-and-white photographs and exhibit boxes punctuate the text.

Stojkovic and Farkas’s *Correctional Leadership* (2003) is the shortest book. It specializes in a narrow, yet important, aspect of correctional administration. The impetus for the book was the first author’s previous work with the California Department of Corrections for its institute of leadership. Divided into seven chapters, the book disproportionately examines the importance of organizational culture.

Carlson and Garrett’s *Prison and Jail Administration: Practice and Theory* (2007) (second edition), the only edited collection in this array, consists of 22 chapters written primarily by practitioners in the field. It covers many of the same subject matters a student may encounter in an introduction to corrections class, along with new material relevant to corrections administration. Chapters range in length from four to nine pages.

Finally, Phillips and McConnell’s *The Effective Corrections Manager* (2005) (second edition) is by far the most comprehensive of all the books on the market. Each of the 30 chapters has an exhibit box called "From the Inside", and at the end of each chapter, there are one or two exercises that students can perform. The book discusses the traditional roles and basic dilemmas in corrections management. The first five chapters could be found in any kind of management text and do not appear to be specific to the field of corrections (e.g. delegation, effective time management). The only difference is that occasional corrections examples are sprinkled within. The authors draw minimally on the scholarly literature on corrections, but include a list of suggested readings, most of which are popular management books.

**Basic Item Analysis**

As Table 1 illustrates, only one of the five leading prison administration textbooks includes a discussion of the new penology (e.g. Feeley & Simon, 1992; Cheliotis, 2006; Robert, 2007). At that, it is only five pages long. Additionally, only two of the books cover any of the correctional administration literature that has been produced in the last few years, and few of the texts provide any theoretical explanations that would help readers understand the complexities of correctional administration. Perhaps these textbook authors (and developmental editors) believe that understanding theory is a luxury in the often stressful world of correctional management.

**Content Analysis**

As noted above, certain topics in the prison administration field are emphasized within these books, while others are minimized. The selected texts focus on
four primary topics: managers/managing, leaders/leading, staff/correctional officer organizations and functions, and human resource management. This is a crucial point, given that introductory textbooks are often students’ first exposure to any particular field. As such, it would seem that a well-rounded exposure to the subject matter would merit attention. As with any field of inquiry, many students become interested in a given topic once it is presented to them (e.g. juvenile delinquency, gangs, convict criminology, feminist criminology and/or occupational crime). Nonetheless, the general marginalization of a topic within introductory prison administration textbooks could dissuade faculty from introducing the topic within an already time-constrained frame (see Table 2).

Authors’ Responses

The investigator’s communication to authors revolved around four simple questions that, while limited in scope, are designed to provide a basic sense of many of the subtle dynamics involved in this subfield.

How Would you Characterize the Correctional Administration Textbook Market?

One of the authors who responded said,

I suspect most authors have found it more profitable to write Intro to Corrections or Intro to Criminal Justice texts. Many find the focused area of correctional administration a difficult area to write about ... at least for a full text. We chose correctional leadership as a topic given the current (2003) state of information about the topic and the need that was evidenced by our experiences with correctional administrators.
He added, “There was very little written about correctional leadership at the time and very little given to correctional officials about how best to lead their organizations under some very difficult circumstances”.

**What Factors Were Involved in your Publisher’s Decision to Release a Revised Edition?**

The investigator questioned authors about the likelihood of additional editions being released as a means of gaging market demand. Only two of the five books...
have released second editions. One respondent said that a revised version is predicated on

a need for current information. A university text must be fresh for the publisher to market. Once a text reaches the ripe old age of 5 years, it becomes much more difficult to demonstrate currency as most professors want the most up to date information for their students. In the case of our text, the original publisher, Aspen, sold their criminal justice line to Jones-Bartlett, and the new publisher was very clear that they wanted an updated text with more pedagogical organization.

Most of the others did not have any indication that their publishers were planning revised edition and claimed that their current sales were "modest".

How Did you go About Determining What Sorts of Content (Subject Matter) you Would Include?

Most respondents to this question cited their expertise in the field as practitioners and university professors. One said,

I have spent 33 years in the field of corrections and worked my way through the ranks and through most positions. I had the benefit of working entry-level jobs through senior posts, and spent 10 years as a federal prison warden. My last 8 years in corrections were spent as an Assistant Director and Regional Director of the federal prison system. I know correctional institutions. I have also taught for many years as an adjunct professor, and have spent the last 8 years as a full-time professor—I feel that I have a good sense of what is needed in a university textbook about correctional administration. My co-editor is an experienced correctional leader and an attorney in the field. Beyond our own expertise, we considered the book reviews and student comments about the first edition over the last six years. Finally, the publisher sought peer review of the text draft, and we made several additions to the text based on comments from reviewers that teach correctional administration at numerous universities across the United States.

Another respondent cited his "experience, looking at other books, and discussing with colleagues". Another writer stated,

I can’t say much about determining contents. I’m the management person; my coauthor … is the corrections expert. The book is based on a management book I wrote for health care for the same publisher. So the management information is from me, and the corrections information, including the case studies, is from ____ except for some of my health care examples the he reworked for corrections.

The fourth respondent stated, “The content was based on our review of the literature in others areas, i.e. public administration, business, organizational development and our experiences with correctional administrators from many state prison systems”.
How do you See your Book as Different From Others on the Market?

According to one of the textbook authors,

Our text is co-edited ... both of us are veterans of state and federal corrections. This contributed text has been written by some of the best in the field, both practitioners and academics. The two co-editors have authored and co-authored numerous chapters in this text and we have found other exceptional talent to contribute their expertise to the text. We selected subjects that are meaningful and critical to a basic understanding of the field, and tried to hold the chapter lengths to short, readable amounts of information. We’ve added pedagogical material to each chapter in this edition, and will publish an Instructor’s Resource Guide in conjunction with the second edition. The first edition was very successful, and we believe the new edition will be even better.

One respondent simply stated that his text differed because it was "very practical". Another stated, "I can’t intelligently answer this question. I’m not familiar with other available books about corrections; I’ve left this to my coauthor and the publisher". A fourth respondent said,

We are different in that our emphasis is on primarily the relationship between leadership and organizational culture. It is our view that so many difficulties in prisons arise due to poorly functioning cultures and aberrant cultures. The trick for key leadership is the creation and perpetuation of healthy cultures within prisons. Many of the problems we see in prisons today are directly related to poor management and leadership (not the same constructs) and limited ways to influence organizational culture. This is not to suggest other issues are not relevant, but culture perpetuation and maintenance are significant for correctional leaders.

Discussion

In reviewing the findings the reader must keep four things in mind:

- **Textbook writers in this field are predominantly former practitioners as opposed to well-recognized scholars in the field.** This may explain their reluctance to integrate theoretical issues—particularly direct discussions of the new penology—into their writing (Feeley & Simon, 1992; Cheliotis, 2006). In other words, this shortcoming may simply be a lack of understanding. On the surface, the new penology is not that complicated to understand; yet textbook writers have to appreciate the role of scholarly research rather than simply pay lip service to it. On the other hand, it may simply be a perception that this kind of discussion is not relevant to the training/pedagogy of their students, many of whom are current or future practitioners and students.

- **Marketing pressures (i.e. perception of the audience) are huge factors in determining content.** Based on the responses to the questionnaires, the content of the "typical" textbook on correctional administration is disproportionately
mandated by marketing pressures and/or audience perception. In other words, publishers’ desires for what a textbook in this field should cover for the sake of boosting sales consequently affects the authors’ choices in the topics he/she covers/includes.

- There is a certain "crowd mentality" in the publishing industry. No textbook author or publisher wants to be too ahead of the curve, for fear of losing a significant amount of the customer base or investing in a project that may potentially give little financial return. Therefore, experimentation or the inclusion of different material is typically introduced very slowly, over several editions, and usually only when appropriate market research has been done to ensure the sales potential.

- The current treatment of the subject matter is a product of precedence. It may well be that the current treatment of the subject matter is a product of precedence and the perceived potential of the market. In this sense, authors and publishers may argue, "If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”.

Summary

As noted by textbook-acquisitions editors, publishers must consider the coverage of topics as well as the ideological view and sophistication of the authors, instructors, and students who will ultimately use, purchase and/or assign the text. These factors impact the text’s marketability, thus potentially risking a significant financial loss after a substantial investment that includes reviews, editing and production. As an author, one must be conscious of the publishers’ wants or risk losing a contract and/or incurring low sales. This is a significant factor in the “hard choices” authors must make.

Recommendations

This research points to three basic recommendations:

1. Develop a survey of scholars who teach this subject matter and determine their preferences for content. Although sending proposals and draft textbooks to qualified instructors, professors and practitioners for feedback is essential in the development of appropriate texts, it is not clear whether these texts were sent to recognized scholars in the correctional administration field. Publishers seem to be relying on post-publication sales data as indicators. Failure to do this kind of research may mean that textbook publishers are shy about making major financial commitments to new books.

2. Publishers should consider developing a reader (or anthology) that makes use of scholarly articles on correctional organizational management. Although Carlson and Garrett’s (2007) is an edited book, it mostly contains practitioner-written chapters. Clearly lacking in this field is an anthology
that includes readings designed to provide thoughtful, scholarly research to users, especially those who have some prior or basic knowledge of the field of corrections. Instructors could select scholarly readings that are reasonably accessible to those contemplating careers in corrections or being trained or working as correctional or probation/parole officers. The book could be divided into parts or themes and could include upwards of 25 chapters, with each discussing material that is relevant to correctional system practitioners as they work or come into contact with the correctional system. It would also be helpful if there were introductory sections for particular groupings of articles. There are several advantages for books in this niche:

- They provide an opportunity for authors/editors and instructors to go into greater depth than allowed in more traditional texts.
- The material presented in the texts can be didactic.
- They force students to go beyond the paradigm of an introductory text.
- They make students examine traditional and emerging problems in a field.
- They are often cheaper than conventional texts because they are shorter and do not need complex layouts that include exhibit boxes, four-color photographs and graphics.
- Instructors can more easily pick and choose the chapters that they want their students to read.
- They can include different points of view.
- They reprint classic or emerging literature that is necessary for a student’s foundation.

These factors, in combination, may motivate instructors to adopt an anthology over a textbook.

3. **Authors of texts need to be more reflective concerning their subject matter.** If so, issues like the new penology would be discussed. Then again, what you read is simply the embodiment of the new penology. The texts emphasize all the criteria of the new managerialism, and it would be inappropriate not to expect this.

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**References**


Appendix A: Leading Prison Administration Texts


Appendix B: Sales Ranking of Texts Based on www.amazon.com

1. Phillips and McConnell 472,861
2. Seiter 667,094
3. Carlson and Garrett 793,989
   (based on the 2005 book, not the 2007 book)
4. Stojkovic and Farkas 1,106,437
5. Freeman 1,232,808


Appendix C: E-mail Letter/questionnaire Sent to Corrections Administration Text Authors

I hope you don’t mind me contacting you.
I am preparing a paper (NOT A BOOK PROPOSAL) which looks at prison administration texts.
I am wondering:
1. Is your text is still in print? If not, why do you think this is the case?
2. Is your publisher going to be releasing another edition?
3. How did you go about determining what sorts of content (subject matter) you would include?
4. How do you see yours as different other on the market?

Thanks in advance,