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Preparing Community Supervision Officers through Undergraduate Education: A Study of Academic and Practitioner Expectations

Brett Garland and Adam K. Matz

Although community corrections courses have existed in universities for decades, studies have yet to explore whether the depth and breadth of academic preparation is meeting practitioner needs. In many jurisdictions across the country, community supervision officers receive little pre-service training, making classroom learning a very important component for job preparation. Using survey data collected from members of the American Society of Criminology, Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, and American Probation and Parole Association, this study examines university faculty and community corrections practitioner expectations regarding topical coverage in undergraduate coursework relevant to the community corrections field. Results indicate that both groups, especially practitioners, gave the strongest preference to coverage of universally applicable job skills such as critical thinking, written and oral communication, and organizational and listening skills. Practitioners generally expected classroom learning to be more in depth and applied than faculty members. Some of the most substantial gaps in expectations were found for daily routine items such as interview skills with offenders, on-the-job decision-making, providing courtroom testimony, and stress coping.

Community supervision officers, a more general term for probation, parole, and sometimes pretrial officers, make substantial contributions to public order and safety by monitoring the movements and behaviors of dangerous and disruptive offenders while simultaneously striving to connect a wide range of supervised individuals to various types of treatment and social services. As a result, these officers navigate a series of challenging and somewhat divergent occupational responsibilities. Some of their tasks include preparing detailed case plans, pre-sentence investigation reports, and court documents; providing courtroom testimony; interviewing clients; facilitating programs or making referrals for services; conducting home and office contacts with supervisees; and assisting with the apprehension of violators and absconders (Hanser, 2014; Lutze, 2014). Considering the multi-faceted nature of this line of work with

roles and responsibilities which span topics traditionally covered within academic disciplines such as criminal justice, legal studies, social work, and psychology, it should not be surprising that most community corrections agencies require their officers to possess a four-year college degree as a condition of employment (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). What might be surprising is that no empirically based guidance has yet materialized for determining the appropriate depth and breadth of academic coverage necessary to adequately prepare college students for this specific component of the corrections field.

The lack of attention given to community corrections education is alarming when considering that community supervision officers stand to benefit more from academic preparation in bachelor's programs than other criminal justice professionals. For example, prosecutors receive extensive and direct preparation for their jobs through law school, and police officers benefit from in-depth academy training that teaches a range of job-specific skills over a rather lengthy period of time—often running up to six months (Blumberg, Giromini, & Jacobson, 2016; Bradford & Pynes, 1999). In contrast, community supervision officers are typically not the beneficiaries of a comprehensive and specially designed post-baccalaureate curriculum as a pre-requisite to the job. Depending on the agency they work for and available resources, they might only receive a few weeks of formal pre-service training to manage their many duties and tasks, which are arguably as diverse and formidable as those confronting prosecution units and law enforcement. With most criminal justice departments offering only a few courses on correctional issues and sometimes only one or none directly aimed at community corrections (Southerland, 2002), and recognizing that limited pre-service training exists for many community supervision employees, exposing students interested in this field to the most current and relevant coursework seems extraordinarily important. This is argued for the sake of making community supervision officers more successful in their efforts to manage probationers and parolees and new recruits less vulnerable to committing unnecessary and costly errors. In addition, improving community corrections education can relieve some of the burden on community corrections agencies related to informing and training new officers regarding community supervision knowledge and skill areas.

In order to effectively evaluate the current state of community corrections as an academic curriculum and assess the need for revision, integrating practitioner insight and input alongside academic perspectives could be especially valuable. Practitioners have been utilized by other academic disciplines to help shape and readjust curricula (Buttler & Du Mont, 1989; Forte & Mathews, 1994). Front-line managers and practitioners can help inform and revise a curriculum related to community corrections since they possess first-hand knowledge of college educated employees' capabilities and deficiencies and have directly observed recent changes in this field. Academics are obviously integral to curricular reform as well. In addition to preparing students for the workforce, many academics are interested in delivering a deeper liberal arts education meant to inspire lifelong engagement in critical and reflective

thinking and to produce enlightened, well-rounded citizens who can contribute to multiple aspects of society. Some scholars have stressed the need for modern university curricula to achieve a convergence between theoretical and practical education as well as cultivate the college student's intellectual and vocational abilities (Berberet & Wong, 1995; Flanagan, 2000). Taking an initial step toward such convergence and cultivation in community corrections education, the current study examines the extent to which academics and practitioners believe college students should be learning about a wide range of community corrections topics.

Literature Review

Curricular Development in Criminal Justice and Corrections

Appreciating the challenges facing curricular reform for community corrections first requires an examination of the historical development of the broader criminal justice discipline. Finckenauer (2005) explains that the beginnings of criminal justice as an academic area of study can be traced to a police professionalization movement that originated in the 1920s–1930s when a new breed of police managers extolled the value of police science and sought to utilize higher education as a means for increasing police productivity. Interestingly, criminal justice did not immediately secure itself as an academic program. The need for a distinct program did not exist considering that prosecutors and defense attorneys were prepared for their professions through law school, job openings for positions in jails and prisons did not have college-level requirements, and probation and parole agencies required a college education but were generally satisfied with any type of specialization (Hanser, 2014).

The proliferation of criminal justice programs in American universities was ignited in 1967 when the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice delivered a landmark report. This commission strongly emphasized that the practice of criminal justice would benefit from a better educated workforce. A year later, federal funding became accessible to a wide range of criminal justice practitioners, including correctional employees, and students interested in any criminal justice career (Flanagan, 2000). As a result of "increased student demand and the influx of federal dollars, colleges raced to establish degree programs named police science, criminology, criminal justice science, and many others" (Flanagan, 2000, p. 5).

In part from its police-specific roots and emphasis on technical training, criminal justice has struggled to gain respect and legitimacy within universities and is typically viewed disparagingly as an applied pseudo-discipline (Clear, 2001; Flanagan, 2000). This negative image was originally fueled by the fact that universities often had to look to police academies and integrate their training models when delivering criminal justice education (Finckenauer, 2005). Notably, the curricular design of criminal justice has evolved from

a primarily vocational effort targeting the policing occupation to an increasingly more social science orientation which typically spans correctional issues (Farnworth, Longmire, & West, 1998). Nonetheless, many modern criminal justice programs have been developed rather “willy-nilly” (Clear, 2001, p. 724), and little consensus exists across criminal justice departments regarding the appropriate structure of the entire curriculum, let alone the specifics of corrections coursework (Southerland, 2002).

The Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) has offered guidance for developing and revising a criminal justice curriculum. In 1998, the ACJS adopted a set of minimum standards for educating college students on criminal justice. Since then, the ACJS has reworked its standards, and in 2005, the ACJS Executive Board adopted a set of curricular criteria specifically for certifying criminal justice programs (Finckenauer, 2005). The ACJS certification standards require bachelor’s programs to cover six different content areas and specifies a handful of subtopics for each area. Corrections is one content area and ACJS requires that correctional topics must include “history, theory, practice and legal environment, development of correctional philosophy, incarceration, diversions, community-based corrections, [and] treatment of offender” (Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences [ACJS], 2014, p. 9). Unfortunately, nothing is written to justify why the topics are important—that is, how the topics specifically benefit the correctional scholar and his or her career preparation. Moreover, no specifications are given regarding the appropriate content and delivery for community corrections and other correctional topics. Reinforcing the lack of consensus on topical coverage in criminal justice programs, only eight bachelor-level programs have received formal ACJS certification (Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences [ACJS], 2015).

Research on Academic and Practitioner Curricular Perspectives

Obviously if an academic program is going to generate successful practitioners, “the curriculum must be able to provide students with the tools necessary to accomplish their goals” (Kelley, 2004, p. 220). In order to achieve such a curriculum, knowing what tools are needed to meet current occupational demands and determining the status of academic program performance in addressing those demands would be instructive. Recent studies by Hart Research Associates (2008, 2010, 2013) indicate that employers generally desire graduates with broad knowledge and skills, including teamwork, ethics, critical thinking, and written and oral communication. In addition, employers are keenly interested in college graduates demonstrating the ability to apply classroom learning to real-world situations, and they emphasize the value of a balanced education involving a mixture of field-specific and interdisciplinary content delivery (Berrett, 2013; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Northeastern News, 2013; Stratford, 2013).

The perspectives of practitioners in security professions, which are closely associated with corrections, have been examined in relation to curricular considerations. Nalla, Christian, Morash, and Schram (1996) asked security managers to rate the importance of a security-based program including a variety of subjects categorized within 10 topic areas. These security managers identified that personnel security, physical security, and community were the most highly ranked topic areas, with effective writing, leadership, security administration, public speaking/presentations, investigation protocols, and asset protection management scored as the most important individual subjects. In social work, the field from which probation emerged as a profession, employers identified the development of communication skills and interpersonal competencies, work-related ethics, and client assessment as highly important for an undergraduate curriculum, whereas disseminating knowledge about research methods, statistical analysis, legislative processes, and computer technology were viewed as least important (Forte & Mathews, 1994).

Although not yet a focus in criminal justice research, several studies have compared the views of practitioners and academics across a variety of fields. For example, Todd (2009) examined perceptions of the public relations curriculum and found that professional advisors in this field were more concerned than academics about new media technology and technical skills, whereas academics placed more emphasis on critical thinking, ethics, theories, and management. Tan, Fowler, and Hawkes (2004) observed more similarities than differences between educators and practitioners on their perceived need for covering management accounting topics; however, educators placed greater emphasis on behavioral implications and practitioners rated topics like process costing, cash flow management, and capital budgeting as more important than academics. Stern and Tseng (2002) found disagreement between academics and practitioners on topical coverage for a marketing research course, with academics more receptive to the course addressing measurement, design, and rudimentary data analysis and practitioners more concerned about coverage of research ethics and advanced statistical analysis and interpretation.

Current Study

The impetus for the current study originated in September 2012 at a National Institute of Corrections (NIC) Urban Chiefs Network meeting where members questioned the quality of academic preparation for college students entering the community corrections profession. In response, NIC crafted a problem statement paper and ensuing discussions motivated NIC to begin exploring how community corrections leaders could influence academic programming so that more college students may be exposed to and gain knowledge about community corrections topics. Interestingly, concerns about academic preparation are not unique to this specific field. The legitimacy and value of a college education for preparing people to meet modern workforce demands have been

widely questioned recently, especially as college costs have risen amid the struggling national economy (Dunn, 2013; Johnson, 2011; Northeastern News, 2012, 2013; Shrag, 2008; Sidhu & Calderon, 2014; Supiano, 2010; Wallace, 2013).

In September 2013, NIC convened a two-day meeting in Aurora, Colorado which involved 22 academics and practitioners who had interests or experience in some facet of community corrections. The NIC meeting participants were divided into workgroups, tasked with discussing the current state of academic preparation for community corrections, and asked to generate ideas for improvement. One of these workgroups focused primarily on the types of knowledge and skills that college graduates should possess to be effective community corrections employees. A wide variety of topics was mentioned such as the need for stronger universal work skills (e.g. effective writing and interpersonal skills), improved knowledge of evidence-based practices (EBPs) (e.g. understanding risk and need assessments and techniques for reinforcing positive behavior), and increased exposure to topics related to clients, programming, and treatment (e.g. understanding substance abuse addiction and treatment and sensitivity to diversity issues). Recognizing the limitations of a small workgroup making recommendations for the larger academic and practitioner populations, suggestions were made to conduct a more penetrating analysis of how the topics are viewed and prioritized across multiple jurisdictions and academic settings (Cebula, 2013).

The NIC meeting set in motion a current NIC-funded project being managed by the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) designed to assess needs and develop curriculum resources that can be used to enhance curricula in criminal justice degree programs on community corrections at the undergraduate level. One of the first steps in that project was the development and administration of a survey which is aimed at addressing two key questions: (1) Which topics do academics and practitioners feel should receive the greatest attention in community corrections coursework? and (2) How do academics and practitioners differ in their coverage preferences? This survey serves as a starting point in a broader NIC initiative to guide the development of a well-informed, professionally meaningful, and academically substantive community corrections curriculum. A void clearly exists regarding the integration of the practitioner voice on topical coverage, as evidenced by community corrections textbook authors acknowledging academic but not practitioner input into the selection and revision of material (e.g. Alarid, 2015; Bayens & Smykla, 2013). With so many diverse topics applicable to community corrections, establishing an empirical framework for prioritizing topic coverage is enormously important, especially when considering the small proportion of criminal justice programming that is devoted specifically to this field. Since differences have been identified in curricular preferences between academics and practitioners across several fields and disciplines, these groups are expected to differ regarding preferences for community corrections education as well.

Data and Methodology

A sizeable portion of the surveys consisted of identical items answered by both groups which enabled comparisons on a number of topics relevant to community corrections education. The authors worked on item wording following the NIC meeting in Colorado and sent NIC workgroup members a revised list to review and from which to brainstorm additional topics. A web-based meeting was held in early 2015 for finalizing items with the workgroup. As a result, 60 items were selected to capture important knowledge and skills which might be obtained through community corrections coursework.

Each of the aforementioned items was accompanied by identical four-point ordinal-based response scales adapted from Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014). Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), later revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), differentiates several layers of thinking. The response options focused on whether participants expected students to be educated on the topic and, if so, whether they felt a student, at a minimum, should remember, understand, or apply the knowledge and skills represented by the items. Remembering was defined in the survey as retaining basic familiarity of the knowledge or skill, understanding as maintaining a complete grasp of the knowledge or skill, and applying as being able to utilize the knowledge or skill in a real-world setting. Participants who had no expectation of students being exposed to a topic were instructed to mark the corresponding item as not applicable. Academics were specifically asked their expectations of students who complete their undergraduate courses addressing community corrections content; practitioners were asked about their expectations of new recruits who had earned a degree in criminology/criminal justice or a related field. The response categories for academic and practitioner expectations are coded as 0 = *not applicable*, 1 = *remember*, 2 = *understand*, and 3 = *apply*.

In addition to the knowledge and skill topics, academic surveys asked a variety of other questions such as preferred teaching strategies, textbook and academic resource quality, student interest in community corrections, and a range of descriptive information, including their academic position, type of department, and years of experience in academia and the corrections profession. Practitioners were asked about the preparation of new recruits in community corrections fields and descriptive information such as their position type, job jurisdiction, type of population served, and work experience.

The academic study population consisted of members of ACJS and the American Society of Criminology (ASC), and APPA members represented the practitioner study population. Surveys were administered in an online format using *Qualtrics* for academics and *Survey Monkey* for practitioners. Two methods were used to notify potential academic participants about the survey. The first was directly sending email notifications to an email list of all ACJS members. The email provided a survey link and informed the ACJS members

that the survey's purpose was to generate information to assist university professors and instructors in educating students about community corrections. The letter specifically requested participation from anyone who had taught or facilitated the delivery of undergraduate corrections courses covering community corrections topics. ACJS members were first emailed the survey link in February 2015, with two reminder emails with links sent in weekly increments. The second method of notification consisted of forwarding a survey link to the ASC's Division of Corrections and Sentencing members. The ASC was not able to provide email addresses, so this Division's chairperson offered to forward the link through a listserv. The survey link and accompanying information regarding the survey's purpose was initially forwarded in February 2015, with one follow-up sent two weeks later. All persons receiving a request to participate in the survey were also provided with an opt-out link if the project did not apply to them.

Community corrections practitioners were contacted via a survey of the APPA membership. An initial mass email distribution to the APPA membership was conducted in early February 2015, followed by a reminder in APPA's electronic bi-weekly newsletter, *CC Headlines*, released five days later. A final mass email was distributed two weeks after the original.

One hundred and nine academics responded to the survey, with 32% serving as assistant professors, 26% as associate professors, 21% as full or distinguished professors, and 16% as instructors or adjunct professors; 19% reported they are currently a department chair or head. Nearly half (46%) described their department as teaching-oriented, 20% as research-oriented, and 29% as having a blended emphasis on teaching and research. A majority of academic respondents (60%) were over age 45; the average number of years spent teaching at a university and teaching corrections courses was 11 and 8 years, respectively; 37% reported they had been employed in community corrections.

Two hundred and twenty-two community supervision practitioners responded to the survey disseminated by APPA. About 80% of the respondents indicated they worked within government, while less than 1% represented tribal or private probation, 3% selected other, and 15% did not specify an affiliation. Of those respondents that indicated they were associated with a government entity, about 53% were local in nature (county, city, or municipal), 41% were with a state entity, and 6% with federal probation. When respondents were asked about their primary occupational responsibilities, 69% indicated probation, 26% assessment and investigation, 24% parole, 18% monitoring services, 16% alternatives to detention, and 15% pretrial services. Approximately 63% noted their agency supervises adults and 31% noted supervision of juveniles. Probation officer was the most frequently identified occupational position (37%), followed by middle management (22%), chief/director (20%), supervisor (14%), and parole officer (11%). On average, APPA respondents possessed 19 years of experience, and half were over age 45.

Results

The tables in this section show college faculty and community corrections practitioners' responses regarding the depth of learning expected of undergraduate students on various topics. Tables 1 and 2 provide the overall ordering of expectation means for the academics and practitioners. To aid interpretation, these topics were divided into five categories, with each category represented by a single table (Tables 3–7). These latter tables are the focus of analysis and include the number of practitioner and faculty participants responding to each item within a given categorization, the item ranking within that specific table, overall item rankings, means, and standard deviations. Each of these tables includes a series of Mann–Whitney *U* statistical test values and corresponding *p* values for determining whether mean differences are statistically significant between academics and practitioners on the rating scales for each item. The Mann–Whitney *U* test is the nonparametric equivalent of an independent *t*-test. Although both table-specific and overall within-group rankings of mean item ratings are provided, overall rankings are primarily given attention in the descriptive analysis.

Table 3 includes 10 topics related to expectations of students regarding knowledge and skills universally applicable to job settings. The top five overall item expectation ratings for each group are within this category. Practitioners rated verbal communication highest, followed closely by written communication, organizational skills, listening skills, and interpersonal skills. Faculty rated critical thinking at the top, followed by written communication, verbal communication, organizational skills, and interpersonal skills. The practitioner group scored other universal items very highly, with time management and critical thinking tying for the 6th highest overall within-group rating, and teamwork and computer skills scoring in the 8th and 9th positions, respectively. Faculty rated interpersonal skills as their 9th highest overall item. All mean item ratings in Table 3, except for time management and giving constructive criticism among faculty, are in the upper third of the overall rankings. With the exception of critical thinking, the mean ratings on each universal item were significantly higher for practitioners than faculty.

Table 4 includes 10 concepts derived from the correctional EBP literature as identified by Hanser (2014). EBP is defined as “practices that have been proven to be effective through rigorous and quantitative analysis” (Krisberg, Marchionna, & Hartney, 2015, p. 90). The only EBP item scoring high enough to fall in the top 10 of overall within-group rankings was targeting correctional intervention to offender needs. The faculty's mean rating for this item reached the 8th highest position, although the faculty expectation here was not significantly greater than for the practitioners. The faculty had additional EBP item means which ranked in the upper third of their overall within-group ratings: assessing risk and need levels using empirically based instruments and using sanctions/punishments to improve offender behavior were the 13th and

Table 1 Practitioner undergraduate knowledge and skill expectations ranking

Rank	Concept	M
1	Verbal communication	2.82
2	Written communication	2.81
3	Ability to organize information	2.74
4	Listening skills	2.73
5	Interpersonal skills	2.72
6	Critical thinking	2.68
6	Time management	2.68
8	Teamwork	2.66
9	Computer skills	2.57
10	Confidentiality of information	2.54
11	Professional ethics standards	2.48
12	Sensitivity to diversity issues	2.47
13	Sensitivity to crime victims	2.37
14	Interview skills with offenders	2.33
15	Giving constructive criticism	2.31
16	Situational awareness	2.30
17	Decision-making on the job	2.28
18	Motivational interviewing	2.25
19	Stress coping skills	2.24
20	Providing constructive feedback for staff and offenders	2.22
21	De-escalation skills	2.20
22	Enhancing the internal motivation of probationers and parolees	2.17
23	Appropriate use of authority with offenders	2.16
24	Use of incentives/rewards to improve offender behavior	2.13
25	Assessing risk and need levels using empirically based instruments	2.12
25	Use of sanctions/punishments to improve offender behavior	2.12
27	Targeting correctional interventions to meet the needs of offenders	2.07
27	Facilitating the development of pro-social networks for offenders	2.07
29	Field safety	2.04
30	Providing documentation of measurable outcomes	2.00
31	Cognitive aspect of offending	1.99
31	Substance abuse addiction	1.99
33	Offender behavioral problems	1.98
34	Causes of crime	1.97
35	Knowledge of broader criminal justice process	1.95
36	Presentence investigation reports	1.93
36	Court testimony	1.93
38	Balance of enforcement and service demands	1.90
39	Urinalysis/drug test procedures	1.88
40	Behavioral theories	1.87
41	Self-defense skills	1.86
42	Cognitive behavioral therapy	1.84
43	Counseling theories	1.82

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

Rank	Concept	M
44	Substance abuse treatment	1.80
45	Domestic violence offenders	1.79
46	Mentally ill offenders	1.78
47	Sex offenders	1.74
47	Revocation procedures	1.74
49	Search and seizure practices	1.71
50	Ensuring offender programs are operating as designed	1.68
50	Offender gang affiliations	1.68
52	Brain impairment and offending	1.66
52	Anger management treatment	1.66
52	Supervision discharge procedures	1.66
55	Use of physical restraint techniques	1.61
55	Case law and statutes	1.61
57	Properly training staff to deliver correctional programs and services	1.57
57	Drug court	1.57
59	Breaking down empirical research studies	1.42
60	Firearms use	1.33

16th highest means, respectively. Providing constructive feedback for staff and offenders was the most strongly rated EBP item among practitioners, settling at 20th in their overall within-group ratings. Interestingly, providing constructive feedback had one of the lowest EBP-specific mean ratings among faculty, with the group difference being both substantively large and statistically significant. Other statistically significant differences in EBP mean item ratings between groups existed for enhancing the internal motivation of clients, using incentives/rewards and sanctions/punishments to change offender behavior, facilitating the development of pro-social networks for offenders, and providing documentation of measurable outcomes. In each case, practitioners gave higher expectation mean ratings than faculty.

Table 5 includes 17 topics related to clients, programming, and treatment. Both practitioners and faculty possessed the same two highest rated expectation items within this category, with sensitivity to diversity issues and sensitivity to crime victims being first and second most strongly rated, respectively. In the overall within-group rankings, sensitivity to diversity was positioned at 6th for faculty and 12th for practitioners; sensitivity to crime issues was ranked at 11th for faculty and 13th for practitioners. Practitioners had significantly greater means than faculty on both items. Faculty scored three additional items from Table 5 in the upper third of their within-group rankings: causes of crime had the 14th strongest rating and the topics of substance abuse treatment and sex offenders tied for the 18th highest rating. Interestingly, mean differences were not significantly different between practitioners and faculty on any of these three items. In addition to the sensitivity to diversity and

Table 2 Faculty undergraduate knowledge and skill expectations ranking

Rank	Concept	M
1	Critical thinking	2.54
2	Written communication	2.49
3	Verbal communication	2.43
4	Ability to organize information	2.38
5	Listening skills	2.18
6	Sensitivity to diversity issues	2.13
7	Presentence investigation reports	2.06
8	Targeting correctional interventions to meet the needs of offenders	2.02
9	Interpersonal skills	1.98
9	Knowledge of broader criminal justice process	1.98
11	Sensitivity to crime victims	1.95
11	Professional ethics standards	1.95
13	Assessing risk and need levels using empirically-based instruments	1.92
14	Causes of crime	1.91
15	Computer skills	1.90
16	Teamwork	1.89
17	Use of sanctions/punishments to improve offender behavior	1.89
18	Substance abuse treatment	1.87
19	Sex offenders	1.87
20	Confidentiality of information	1.87
21	Offender behavioral problems	1.86
22	Mentally ill offenders	1.83
23	Drug court	1.82
24	Substance abuse addiction	1.79
25	Domestic violence offenders	1.78
26	Use of incentives/rewards to improve offender behavior	1.77
27	Providing documentation of measurable outcomes	1.74
28	Time management	1.73
29	Offender gang affiliations	1.72
30	Cognitive aspect of offending	1.68
30	Breaking down empirical research studies	1.68
32	Revocation procedures	1.67
33	Behavioral theories	1.66
34	Cognitive behavioral therapy	1.65
35	Enhancing the internal motivation of probationers and parolees	1.64
35	Balance of enforcement and service demands	1.64
37	Facilitating the development of pro-social networks for offenders	1.62
37	Ensuring offender programs are operating as designed	1.62
37	Anger management treatment	1.62
40	Situational awareness	1.58
41	Case law and statutes	1.57
42	Decision-making on the job	1.56
43	Giving constructive criticism	1.54

(Continued)

Table 2 (Continued)

Rank	Concept	M
44	Appropriate use of authority with offenders	1.51
45	Providing constructive feedback for staff and offenders	1.50
45	Search and seizure practices	1.50
47	Interview skills with offenders	1.46
48	Properly training staff to deliver correctional programs and services	1.45
49	Counseling theories	1.38
50	Stress coping skills	1.36
51	Motivational interviewing	1.32
52	Brain impairment and offending	1.24
52	Urinalysis/drug test procedures	1.24
54	De-escalation skills	1.22
55	Court testimony	1.09
56	Field safety	1.05
57	Supervision discharge procedures	1.04
58	Use of physical restraint techniques	.86
59	Firearms use	.70
60	Self-defense skills	.60

victimization items, the mean expectation ratings for counseling theories, cognitive aspects of offending, brain impairment and offending, and behavioral theories were significantly higher for practitioners than faculty. In contrast, faculty had significantly higher mean ratings than practitioners on the drug court item.

Table 6 contains nine items pertaining to officer–offender interactions. Confidentiality of information had the highest expectation mean among both practitioners and faculty for this category, and the difference in means was statistically significant. Confidentiality of information also ranked highly in the overall within-group ratings, with the item positioned at 8th for faculty and 10th for practitioners. Practitioners also rated interview skills with offenders, situational awareness, and motivational interviewing strongly enough to fall in the upper third of their overall within-group rankings at 14th, 16th, and 18th, respectively. Each difference in mean ratings between groups on these items was statistically significant and noticeably sizeable. Practitioners had significantly greater mean ratings on each item in Table 6, except for the search and seizure item.

Table 7 includes 14 additional topics which did not fit neatly within the other table categories. Both practitioners and faculty had relatively high overall within-group mean expectation ratings for the professional ethics item. Professional ethics standards received the 11th highest overall expectation rating for both groups, with practitioners giving a significantly stronger mean score than faculty. Faculty rated presentence investigation reports and knowledge of the criminal justice process as their 7th–9th strongest overall within-group

Table 3 A comparison of practitioner and faculty expectations for universal knowledge and skills items

Item	Respondents	N	Table rank	Overall rank	M	SD	U	p
Written communication	Practitioners	219	2	2	2.81	.50	8,549.50	.001
	Faculty	103	2	2	2.49	.73		
Verbal communication	Practitioners	219	1	1	2.82	.46	7,867.50	.001
	Faculty	103	3	3	2.43	.74		
Ability to organize information	Practitioners	219	3	3	2.74	.58	8,042.00	.001
	Faculty	103	4	4	2.38	.73		
Critical thinking	Practitioners	219	6	6	2.68	.63	10,042.50	.063
	Faculty	103	1	1	2.54	.71		
Teamwork	Practitioners	220	8	8	2.66	.59	7,453.00	.001
	Faculty	103	8	16	1.89	1.22		
Listening skills	Practitioners	218	4	4	2.73	.58	7,095.00	.001
	Faculty	102	5	5	2.18	.90		
Computer skills	Practitioners	217	9	9	2.57	.67	8,077.00	.001
	Faculty	102	7	15	1.90	1.24		
Time management	Practitioners	217	6	6	2.68	.57	5,077.00	.001
	Faculty	103	9	28	1.73	1.03		
Interpersonal skills	Practitioners	217	5	5	2.72	.57	5,507.50	.001
	Faculty	102	6	9	1.98	1.07		
Giving constructive criticism	Practitioners	217	10	15	2.31	.74	6,685.60	.001
	Faculty	102	10	43	1.54	1.10		

Table 4 A comparison of practitioner and faculty expectations for evidence-based practices items

Item	Respondents	N	Table rank	Overall				
				rank	M	SD	U	p
Assessing risk and need levels using empirically based instruments	Practitioners Faculty	206 103	4 2	25 13	2.12 1.92	.80 .84	9,300.00	.057
Enhancing the internal motivation of probationers and parolees	Practitioners Faculty	206 104	2 6	22 35	2.17 1.64	.81 .85	7,147.00	.001
Targeting correctional interventions to meet the needs of offenders	Practitioners Faculty	205 104	6 1	27 8	2.07 2.02	.85 .81	10,277.00	.580
Properly training staff to deliver correctional programs and services	Practitioners Faculty	206 104	10 10	57 48	1.57 1.45	1.02 .89	9,937.00	.275
Use of incentives/rewards to improve offender behavior	Practitioners Faculty	192 103	3 4	24 26	2.13 1.77	.88 .94	7,712.50	.001
Use of sanctions/punishments to improve offender behavior	Practitioners Faculty	191 103	4 3	25 16	2.12 1.89	.92 .91	8,298.00	.028
Facilitating the development of pro-social networks for offenders	Practitioners Faculty	206 104	6 7	27 37	2.07 1.62	.84 .92	7,811.00	.001
Providing documentation of measurable outcomes	Practitioners Faculty	205 104	8 5	30 27	2.00 1.74	.81 .95	9,115.50	.026
Providing constructive feedback for staff and offenders	Practitioners Faculty	206 101	1 9	20 45	2.22 1.50	.85 1.02	6,274.50	.001
Ensuring offender programs are operating as designed	Practitioners Faculty	205 104	9 7	50 37	1.68 1.62	.93 .89	10,268.50	.575

Table 5 A comparison of practitioner and faculty expectations on items related to clients, programming, and treatment

Item	Respondents	N	Table rank	Overall rank	M	SD	U	P
Sensitivity to crime victims	Practitioners	200	2	13	2.37	.72	7,735.50	.001
	Faculty	102	2	11	1.95	.94		
Sensitivity to diversity issues	Practitioners	200	1	12	2.47	.69	7,962.00	.001
	Faculty	102	1	6	2.13	.85		
Causes of crime	Practitioners	199	6	34	1.97	.62	9,695.00	.682
	Faculty	100	3	14	1.91	.77		
Counseling theories	Practitioners	199	9	43	1.82	.72	7,688.00	.001
	Faculty	102	16	49	1.38	.97		
Cognitive aspect of offending	Practitioners	198	3	31	1.99	.69	8,121.00	.002
	Faculty	102	12	30	1.68	.86		
Cognitive behavioral therapy	Practitioners	199	8	42	1.84	.78	8,960.50	.074
	Faculty	102	14	34	1.65	.90		
Mentally ill offenders	Practitioners	198	12	46	1.78	.69	9,637.50	.465
	Faculty	102	7	22	1.83	.77		
Brain impairment and offending	Practitioners	200	15	52	1.66	.67	7,524.00	.001
	Faculty	102	17	52	1.24	.88		
Offender behavioral problems	Practitioners	199	5	33	1.98	.75	9,102.50	.182
	Faculty	100	6	21	1.86	.72		
Behavioral theories	Practitioners	200	7	40	1.87	.69	8,896.50	.047
	Faculty	102	13	33	1.66	.84		
Substance abuse addiction	Practitioners	200	3	31	1.99	.70	8,767.00	.051
	Faculty	100	9	24	1.79	.77		
Substance abuse treatment	Practitioners	200	10	44	1.80	.76	9,569.00	.328
	Faculty	102	4	18	1.87	.74		

(Continued)

Table 5 (Continued)

Item	Respondents	N	Table rank	Overall rank	M	SD	U	p
Drug court	Practitioners	200	17	57	1.57	.81	8,530.00	.011
	Faculty	102	8	23	1.82	.72		
Anger management treatment	Practitioners	200	15	52	1.66	.76	9,887.00	.629
	Faculty	102	15	37	1.62	.78		
Domestic violence offenders	Practitioners	200	11	45	1.79	.77	10,074.50	.847
	Faculty	102	10	25	1.78	.86		
Sex offenders	Practitioners	199	13	47	1.74	.77	9,211.50	.149
	Faculty	102	4	18	1.87	.80		
Offender gang affiliations	Practitioners	199	14	50	1.68	.79	9,515.00	.498
	Faculty	100	11	29	1.72	.85		

Table 6 A comparison of practitioner and faculty expectations for officer-offender interaction items

Item	Respondents	N	Table rank	Overall rank	M	SD	U	P
Motivational interviewing	Practitioners	192	4	18	2.25	.87	5,290.00	.001
	Faculty	103	7	51	1.32	1.10		
Confidentiality of information	Practitioners	192	1	10	2.54	.74	6,676.50	.001
	Faculty	103	1	18	1.87	1.15		
Situational awareness (e.g. awareness of dangerous situations)	Practitioners	192	3	16	2.30	.86	6,513.00	.001
	Faculty	103	3	40	1.58	1.18		
Search and seizure practices	Practitioners	192	8	49	1.71	1.05	8,942.00	.161
	Faculty	103	5	45	1.50	1.15		
Balance of enforcement and service demands	Practitioners	192	7	38	1.90	.97	8,437.50	.028
	Faculty	103	2	35	1.64	.96		
Interview skills with offenders	Practitioners	192	2	14	2.33	.88	5,297.00	.001
	Faculty	102	6	47	1.46	1.06		
De-escalation skills	Practitioners	192	5	21	2.20	.97	5,220.50	.001
	Faculty	103	8	54	1.22	1.12		
Appropriate use of authority with offenders	Practitioners	191	6	23	2.16	.98	6,109.50	.001
	Faculty	99	4	44	1.51	1.06		
Use of physical restraint techniques	Practitioners	192	9	55	1.61	1.07	5,992.50	.001
	Faculty	101	9	58	.86	1.06		

Table 7 A comparison of practitioner and faculty expectations for additional items

Item	Respondents	N	Table rank	Overall rank	M	SD	U	p
Breaking down empirical research studies	Practitioners	189	13	59	1.42	.81	8,143.00	.015
	Faculty	103	4	30	1.68	.95		
Presentence investigation reports	Practitioners	189	6	36	1.93	.91	8,909.00	.206
	Faculty	103	1	7	2.06	.92		
Urinalysis/drug test procedures	Practitioners	189	8	39	1.88	.99	6,494.00	.001
	Faculty	103	9	52	1.24	1.02		
Case law and statutes	Practitioners	189	12	55	1.61	.82	9,648.50	.896
	Faculty	103	6	41	1.57	.94		
Stress coping skills	Practitioners	189	3	19	2.24	.89	5,376.00	.001
	Faculty	102	8	50	1.36	1.10		
Professional ethics standards	Practitioners	189	1	11	2.48	.80	6,895.50	.001
	Faculty	102	3	11	1.95	1.06		
Court testimony	Practitioners	188	6	36	1.93	1.00	5,576.50	.001
	Faculty	103	10	55	1.09	1.05		
Revocation procedures	Practitioners	188	10	47	1.74	1.03	9,071.00	.350
	Faculty	103	5	32	1.67	.83		
Firearms use	Practitioners	189	14	60	1.33	1.15	6,683.00	.001
	Faculty	103	13	59	.70	.95		
Supervision discharge procedures	Practitioners	188	11	52	1.66	1.05	6,490.50	.001
	Faculty	103	12	57	1.04	.96		
Field safety	Practitioners	189	4	29	2.04	1.06	4,924.50	.001
	Faculty	102	11	56	1.05	1.02		
Knowledge of broader criminal justice process	Practitioners	188	5	35	1.95	.80	9,190.00	.530
	Faculty	102	2	9	1.98	.89		
Decision-making on the job	Practitioners	189	2	17	2.28	.92	5,746.50	.001
	Faculty	102	7	42	1.56	1.01		
Self-defense skills	Practitioners	188	9	41	1.86	1.06	3,835.00	.001
	Faculty	101	14	60	.60	.95		

expectations, although statistically significant mean differences were not found between groups for these items. Practitioners rated on-the-job decision-making and stress coping skills as 17th–19th in their overall within-group rankings, and practitioners had significantly greater mean ratings here compared to faculty. Practitioners also had significantly higher expectation means than faculty for drug testing, court testimony, firearms use, supervision discharge procedures, field safety, and self-defense skills. Although not placing highly in either of the within-group rankings, faculty had significantly higher mean ratings than practitioners on the breaking down research studies item. The lowest overall within-group mean ratings are presented in Table 7, with practitioners scoring lowest on breaking down research studies and firearms use and faculty scoring at the bottom on firearms use and self-defense skills.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to identify academic and practitioner expectations of college students regarding the topical coverage they should receive in preparation for a career in the community corrections field; and (b) to determine the extent to which academics and practitioners may differ in their expectations. The results reinforce prior research which indicates that employers are seeking college graduates who are well-rounded and well-versed in fundamental components of a liberal arts education, such as critical thinking, written and oral communication, and the ability to organize, listen, and relate to others (Forte & Mathews, 1994; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Nalla et al., 1996; Todd, 2009). Fortunately, community corrections faculty are heavily emphasizing the need for students to master these widely applicable skills. However, the extent to which faculty respondents believe these topics should be covered within community corrections remains unclear. Faculty members are undoubtedly cognizant of the role that general education curricula play in developing these universally applicable skills and therefore may give them limited attention in corrections coursework.

The community corrections practitioners expected college students to receive deeper learning than academics on a large number of topics, especially those pertaining to universal knowledge and skills and related to more job-specific daily tasks. Gaps in both mean expectation responses and post hoc rankings between groups were very salient on several daily function items, such as interview skills with offenders, on-the-job decision-making, providing court testimony, motivational interviewing, and stress coping. This is unsurprising considering that scholarly attention is not typically focused on routine operations and job adjustment factors and consequently relevant instructional material may be difficult to access or unavailable for integration into lectures and class discussions. Nevertheless, it raises the question of whether academics should devote more attention to these kinds of issues specifically in community corrections courses and perhaps create supplementary materials or

seek out applicable resources from other disciplines. As noted earlier, academic instruction for probation and parole officers probably needs to be more extensive and penetrating for satisfactory occupational preparation since many do not benefit from lengthy academy training like law enforcement personnel and prosecutors.

One might be surprised that practitioners had deeper expectations than faculty regarding student learning about the core features of EBP. This is because these EBPs were identified through rigorous academic research, and academics tend to emphasize the importance of concepts and approaches rooted in strong empirical grounding. Perhaps, faculty teaching correctional courses have not been exposed as regularly as practitioners to documents which specify the core components of the evidence-based literature. Alternatively, faculty teaching undergraduate courses may not feel sufficient class time is available to substantively cover EBPs and to also provide a meaningful survey of all relevant community corrections topics. In addition, faculty may view exposure to EBP as more appropriate for advanced students taking graduate-level courses. Another possibility is that faculty may simply feel that textbooks and supplementary materials already offer sufficient coverage of EBP-related topics for undergrads.

Regardless of placement in the within-group rankings, results demonstrate that both academics and practitioners ascribed a measure of importance to nearly all topics. Faculty responses to the firearms and self-defense skills items are the only instances where expectations of college students gaining at least some topic familiarity were in doubt. As a result, the findings legitimize that coverage of each topic examined here is worthy of consideration in a community corrections curriculum that aims to impact the field. Some of these topics fit naturally with corrections courses, such as those pertaining to EBP components, drug courts, offender interviewing, appropriate use of correctional authority, and development of presentence investigation reports. However, many topics, such as behavioral theories, sex offender management, giving constructive criticism, de-escalation skills, and stress coping, might be better covered in separate courses within the broader criminal justice curriculum or through outside disciplines. The EBP literature in corrections has developed tremendously in the past few decades and might be best taught through its own course. Academic programs are encouraged to analyze their curriculum and determine the best possible settings for topical coverage.

A few key limitations are noteworthy. First, the results are based on convenience-based samples. Although research on APPA, ACJS, and ASC members is not new (e.g. Bartula & Worrall, 2012; Miller, 2015), these organizations' memberships may not be representative of the broader study populations of community corrections practitioners and college-level faculty. However, the advantage of utilizing these organizations is that each one is national in scope and thus provides broad geographical coverage. A second limitation is that the community corrections topic items were generated by a rather small group of academics and practitioners. Validating the list as exhaustive of all topics

relevant to community corrections was not possible. The workgroup creating the list had extensive discussions about appropriate survey topics on two separate occasions, increasing the authors' confidence that the vast majority of relevant topics are covered. A third limitation is that the closed-ended nature of the analyzed survey items does not permit any way of knowing why respondents rated items as they did. Qualitative feedback through focus groups and in-depth interviews would be beneficial for examining the reasoning behind responses. Fourth, the consistently stronger expectations of practitioners could be resulting from a more liberal interpretation of the response scale. As noted, this scale was adapted from Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, and the use of more traditional and familiar importance and effectiveness scales might have produced different results. Finally, item responses were ranked in post hoc fashion to identify how respondents were prioritizing topics. Thus, participants did not rank items in order themselves, which might have produced different results had they done so.

In conclusion, this study takes a step toward developing a stronger community corrections curriculum that both nurtures student academic growth and meets contemporary professional needs. The study has made important progress by demonstrating how academics and practitioners prioritize and differ in their perceptions of topic coverage relevant to community corrections. Clearly, both academics and practitioners expect college students who plan to enter the community corrections field to have learned a set of skills transferable to all types of work settings. Practitioners generally expected fresh recruits to have received a more in-depth education than faculty in multiple areas, and they also demonstrated a salient interest in newcomers being prepared to deal with daily demands specific to the field.

NIC and APPA, in collaboration with the original academic-practitioner workgroup, are currently utilizing this study's results to explore methods for improving dissemination of knowledge and skills relevant to modern community corrections. Part of this effort involves identifying effective resources to fill coverage gaps in current textbooks and supplementary materials. The NIC and APPA might also consider creating an academic-practitioner partnership aimed at developing teaching materials which specifically target and prioritize topics which faculty and practitioners feel are in most need of coverage. Online instructional tapings could be developed to cover topic areas which practitioners find important but receive limited coverage in academic-based criminal justice resources.

Community corrections agencies can vary significantly in their philosophical orientations, enforcement strategies, and treatment approaches, so curricular considerations at universities may need to be specialized to fit the priorities of jurisdictions predominantly hiring their graduates. Building and sustaining local academic-practitioner collaborations offer a means for guiding curricular design in an attempt to maximize educational value in colleges. One step academics can take to develop collaborations and strengthen curricular design and delivery is to invite guest speakers from the field to discuss their perceptions

of weaknesses in community corrections job preparation. An additional possibility is to develop local advisory boards consisting of correctional professionals who can help guide community corrections content selection and delivery. Ultimately, more research is necessary both nationally and locally, although the hope is that this study will spark additional discussions and explorations aimed at improving community corrections education.

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Notes on Contributors

Brett Garland is a professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Missouri State University where he coordinates a community corrections graduate certificate program. He received his PhD from the University of Nebraska, Omaha in 2007. His research interests include criminal justice work environments, prisoner reentry, and public opinion research.

Adam K. Matz is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of North Dakota. He previously worked as a research associate with the American Probation and Parole Association. He recently completed his PhD in criminology at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. His research interests include interagency collaboration, organizational culture and officer workload, offender recidivism and desistance, and youth mentoring.

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