BOOT CAMPS:
A Washington State Update
and Overview of National Findings

Carol Poole
Peggy Slavick

Washington State Institute for Public Policy
The Evergreen State College
MS: TA-00, Seminar 3162
Olympia, Washington 98505
(360) 866-6000, ext. 6380
Fax: (360) 866-6825

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David Griffith, Boot Camp Project Coordinator, Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration;  
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BOOT CAMPS: A Washington State Update  
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Executive Summary

The number of adult and juvenile boot camps is increasing nationwide, beginning with a 50-bed program in Georgia in 1983. At least 70 boot camps for adult offenders are now operating in state, federal, and local jails and prisons. Boot camps for adults are becoming increasingly open to female offenders, including Washington’s co-ed Work Ethic Camp; most juvenile camps serve male offenders exclusively.

Most state boot camp programs have incorporated many typical military features, such as military titles and protocol, barracks-style housing, drill instructors, grouping in platoons, and summary punishment. Boot camps do vary widely, however, with respect to the amount of time spent per day on military drill and discipline—many emphasize education, job training, and counseling, with the typical state program allocating 20 percent of each day to such.

With the absence of effective evaluation results to date, it is difficult to determine if boot camps are achieving their multiple goals of reducing recidivism, achieving cost savings, and having a positive effect on prison crowding.* There does appear to be evidence that boot camps have a positive effect on adult and juvenile offenders’ attitudes, and that it improves their educational performance and physical conditioning.

National Findings for Adult Boot Camps:

- Current research findings do not support the claims that boot camps reduce recidivism rates: “the impact of boot camp programs on offender recidivism is at best negligible” and “there is still no clear evidence that boot camps reduce recidivism.”

- Several states do have boot camp programs that are large enough to affect prison crowding. New York’s boot camp program, the second largest nationwide, was estimated to have saved their Department of Correctional Services over 1,800 beds. Researchers summarized, “…carefully designed programs can reduce prison crowding.”

- Cost savings can be achieved only when boot camps keep offenders a shorter time than they would have spent in prison. The actual daily operating cost per inmate for boot camp programs exceeds that of prison. If boot camp is used as an alternative to lower-cost sentencing alternatives, such as parole, costs will be increased. The key to controlling costs lies in the selection process into the program—camps whose inmates are selected by

* Continuing to follow the evaluation results of studies on boot camp programs in Oregon and California may provide more information on the effects of boot camps on recidivism.
the state Department of Corrections, from among offenders who would have otherwise served time in prison, are more likely to achieve cost savings. Several states have estimated a substantial cost savings associated with their boot camp programs (New York, Louisiana, Florida, and Oregon).

**Washington’s Work Ethic Camp:**

Washington’s co-ed Work Ethic Camp for adult offenders, located at the McNeil Island Corrections Center, opened on November 1, 1993. This highly-regimented 120-day program emphasizes work skills, social skills, education, and substance abuse rehabilitation in a highly-structured environment. The enacting legislation requires that an outcome evaluation of the camp be completed by January 15, 1988.

**Washington’s Juvenile Basic Training Camp:**

Due to open in late 1995, Washington’s Juvenile Basic Training Camp was enacted into legislation in SESH Bill 2319, a package of measures to address youth violence. This camp is to provide basic education, work-based learning, counseling, and substance abuse intervention, as well as “structured intensive physical training.” The site for the camp has not yet been determined.
BOOT CAMPS: A Washington State Update and Overview of National Findings

Introduction:

Since the publication of Washington State’s Work Ethic Camp: Proposal for an Evaluation (October 1993), Washington State has opened the Work Ethic Camp for adult offenders, and passed legislation to develop a Basic Training Camp for juvenile offenders. This paper discusses both of these developments, and provides an update of the national research findings on this topic.

At least 70 boot camps for adult offenders are now operating in state, federal, and local jails and prisons. The first boot camp of this type was a 50-bed program in Georgia which opened in 1983. Although the image of boot camps is usually tied to male offenders, the programs are increasingly open to women offenders; over one-quarter of state-operated boot camps nationwide are either co-ed or female-only camps, including Washington’s co-ed Work Ethic Camp. In co-ed camps, female offenders live in separate housing and are assigned to separate work details.

Another development is a growth in the number of boot camps for juvenile offenders. Since 1990, the number of juvenile boot camps in the United States has grown from one to over a dozen. The federal government and at least ten states operate juvenile boot camps; another six states (including Washington) are planning to open one. Most juvenile boot camps serve male offenders exclusively.

Background:

The definition of “boot camps” is not widely agreed upon. Originally, such programs were referred to as “shock incarceration” programs, and emphasized disciplined environments. The term “boot camp” specifically referred to military training experiences composed of intense physical activity with extreme discipline requirements. As one study notes, the distinction between boot camps and other types of “shock incarceration” is frequently unclear:

“Because boot camps have proven so popular with legislators and other potential backers, no doubt many program developers find it prudent to stretch the term to include as broad a range of programs as possible.”

The National Institute for Justice’s Overview and Update distinguished between shock incarceration programs and boot camps, and noted that “a shock program need not involve a military-style setting,” and “is sometimes applied to other types of interventions, such as shock probation, shock parole, or split-sentencing.

Most state boot camp programs have the following military characteristics in place: barracks-style housing, military titles for staff, military-style protocol, drill instructors, military-style uniforms for staff, grouping in platoons, summary punishment (on-the-spot punishment for misbehavior,
such as push-ups), group rewards and punishments, and public graduation ceremonies. Most adult and juvenile programs typically range from 90 to 120 days. (Washington’s Work Ethic Camp is a 120-day program; Oregon’s Summit boot camp is a 180-day program.)

Boot camps do vary widely, however, in practice and philosophy with regard to military activities and environment. Currently, there are no sources of information that describe the range of variation nationwide. In a statewide survey, some of the newest programs—California and Texas—were found to have the least “militaristic” programs overall, employing only a few military characteristics (barracks-style housing, drill instructors, and military titles and protocol). At the other extreme, Massachusetts’ program employs all of the following military features: barracks-style housing, military titles and protocol, drill instructors, uniforms for staff and offenders, grouping in platoons, summary and group punishments, group rewards, and public graduation ceremonies. Subsequently, there are great differences in the amount of time spent on typical military activities and time spent on education/counseling and fitness. For example, Pennsylvania allocates 70 percent of its day to education/counseling, 20 percent to fitness, and 10 percent to military drill, discipline and physical labor. In comparison, South Carolina allocates only 10 percent of its day to education/counseling, 10 percent to fitness, and 80 percent to military activities and work.

Dropouts or failures typically occur relatively early in boot camp programs nationwide. The dropout and failure (termination) rates for state programs ranged from 3 to 42 percent, in a five-state multi-site study (MacKenzie, 1990). In a survey of local boot camps, (Austin and Bolyard, 1992) the termination rates ranged from 7 to 52 percent—the most common reason for termination was disciplinary action. The average termination rate for Washington State’s Work Ethic Camp for adult offenders was 30 percent. Such variations in the termination rate for boot camps are affected by the amount of misconduct tolerated in each camp, as well as other factors such as adequate medical screening prior to entrance into the program.
Research Update of National Findings:

This section discusses the national research findings on adult and juvenile boot camps.

Evaluations of Adult Boot Camps:

Proponents of boot camps argue that: 1) the intensity of a boot camp can rehabilitate offenders, and 2) the program’s brevity lowers the overall correction costs because the offender’s incarceration time is reduced. Some programs seem to have helped participants improve their physical conditioning, educational level, employment prospects, and access to community programs. Drug counseling and education have become standard elements of boot camp programs, with the typical state program devoting 20 percent of each day to counseling and education.

Recidivism: The proponent's claims regarding lower recidivism rates from boot camps have not been supported by the research. While several states found slightly lower recidivism rates for boot camp graduates than for a comparison group, it is impossible to determine whether the differences were caused by the program, or by other differences between the two groups of offenders. A 1993 report by the GAO found:

“...no clear indication that boot camps have measurably reduced recidivism....the programs that have attempted to measure recidivism have shown that boot camp graduates have only marginally lower recidivism rates than similar inmates in traditional prisons. In addition, any differences in the rates tend to diminish over time.”

A 1994 National Institute of Justice evaluation of eight boot camps also concluded that “the impact of boot camp programs on offender recidivism is at best negligible.” However, offenders who are released from boot camp programs appear to perform just as well as those who serve longer prison terms after release—“there is no reason to believe that boot camp graduates do any worse than comparison groups.”

Preliminary results from a recent evaluation of Oregon's one-year-old boot camp program appear positive: “of the first 58 boot camp graduates, only one had been returned to prison, and that was for a violation of conditions of release, not for a new crime.” However, the researchers noted that it is “too early to draw definite conclusions about rearrest rates or other recidivism measures.”
**Influence on Prison Population Crowding:** Several states now have boot camp programs that are large enough to affect the amount of crowding in correctional facilities. The 1994 National Institute of Justice evaluation found that boot camps in two states (New York and Louisiana) out of eight surveyed reduced a state’s need for prison beds.  

Eleven of 26 states surveyed by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) said they believe their programs have reduced crowding in prisons to a “great” or a “very great” extent. In order for boot camp programs to have an effect on prison crowding, they must: be large in relation to the rest of the institutional system, serve offenders who would otherwise have been incarcerated elsewhere, and inmates of the programs must: spend less time in boot camp than they would have in prison, not return to prison, and graduate from the program (MacKenzie and Parent, 1992).

Several states have evaluated the influence of their boot camp programs on crowding. The second largest boot camp program in the nation, in New York State, was revealed to have saved their Department of Correctional Services over 1,800 beds. National researchers summarized: “carefully designed programs can reduce prison crowding.”

**Cost Savings:** Boot camps can be less costly than prison, but only when the boot camp sentence replaces a longer prison sentence. Because of the intensity and scale of the program, the average daily cost per inmate tends to be higher for boot camps than for prison. For example, New York’s average daily cost per inmate for boot camp was $69.23, compared to $48.47 for prison. For some states, the differences in average daily costs were not significant—Illinois’ boot camp daily cost per inmate was $44.59, and for prison it was $43.80; and for Georgia, the costs were found to be equal at $48.64 for both boot camp and prison. If boot camp is used as an alternative to lower-cost sentencing alternatives, such as parole, costs will be increased. Dropouts and program failures also affect costs, especially if dropouts are returned to prison for the remainder of their original sentence.

Sixteen states provided cost comparisons to the GAO; nine believed that boot camp costs more and four believed it costs about the same. Several states have estimated the cost savings associated with their programs (New York, Louisiana, Florida, Georgia, and Oregon); “New York estimates a savings of $2.02 million in care and custody costs for every 100 inmates released from boot camp, amounting to over $124 million so far.” Oregon’s program was modeled after New York State’s highly-structured program, and researchers estimate that the boot camp will save Oregon 1.4 million per year.

The key to controlling costs lies in the selection process into the program. Inmates selected for the program must stay there a shorter time than they would otherwise be incarcerated. Researchers have observed that camps relying on judicial orders to select inmates are more likely to “widen the net,” and increase costs by including more offenders who would not otherwise be sentenced to prison. On the other hand, camps whose inmates are selected by the state Department of Corrections—from among prisoners—are more likely to achieve cost savings.
Other Effects: Some of the more positive results of boot camps that were noted by state programs include: helping inmates improve their physical conditioning, educational level, employment prospects, and access to community programs. However, these results have been reported by “only a handful of programs so far” and some improvements may be the effect of the intensive aftercare program rather than boot camp itself.34 There is also some evidence that boot camps provide a safer and more orderly environment for offenders than regular prison, and that offenders find it to be a positive experience, which is an important factor of any program that hopes to rehabilitate.35

Problems experienced by boot camps have ranged from loss of funding—to compromised security—to allegations of inmate abuse. The Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department closed its boot camps in 1992, when they proved to be more costly than other sentencing options.36 A National Guard boot camp in Connecticut was closed in 1994 when an investigation found gang activity, drug abuse, violence, and inadequate staffing.37 Boot camps in several states have had allegations of physical or psychological abuse of inmates.38 Inmate deaths, apparently from undetected health conditions aggravated by intensive training, have occurred in two states’ boot camps.39

In addition, there is a higher turnover in staff positions in adult boot camps than elsewhere in the correctional system, due to high-stress positions such as drill instructor. High staff turnover was also found in two of the three juvenile programs evaluated by the American Institutes for Research for the National Institute of Justice.40
Evaluations of Juvenile Boot Camps:

The state of California and the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) are each studying the impact of juvenile boot camps—preliminary findings from these evaluations follow.

- The American Institutes for Research evaluated three **Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention** boot camps for juvenile offenders for the **National Institute of Justice** during the time period of April 1992 through March 1993. This evaluation was conducted to provide information about program design and implementation of three juvenile demonstration programs in Alabama, Colorado, and Ohio. The researchers did not track post-program recidivism or the costs of alternate placements, and, consequently, could not assess the impact of the programs on overcrowding or cost savings.

  All three programs were 90-day residential programs for male juveniles only, and only Ohio’s program was voluntary. The evaluators found “both empirical and anecdotal evidence of positive changes in the skills, behaviors, and attitudes of participants” at the 90-day conclusion of the boot camp phase. Findings indicated that youth improved their educational performance, physical fitness, and behavior. However, without an experimental design, it could not be determined if these changes were results of the boot camp program itself or due to other preexisting differences in the program participants.

  Also, these promising results appeared to disintegrate during the aftercare phase. All three programs had high attrition rates for noncompliance, absenteeism, and new arrests during the aftercare period. Based on findings from this evaluation, recommendations for juvenile boot camps included: clearly define how activities are expected to affect the youth; clearly define and select a target population (offenders with a previous experience of incarceration do not perform well in boot camp settings); make the transition from an intensely-structured, closely-monitored boot camp structure to aftercare in a careful fashion, so youth can adjust to the community more slowly; set rules and expectations for youth during aftercare, including sanctions; and anticipate high staff turnover rates and provide regular training opportunities for staff.

- **California** is conducting an experimental (random-assignment method) program evaluation of its **LEAD** (Leadership, Esteem, Ability and Discipline) program for juvenile offenders (**a boot camp and intensive parole program**), which opened in 1992. The study will be completed in 1996; the effect of the program will be determined by differences between the experimental (LEAD) and control groups on: institutional lengths of stay, estimated program costs, and recidivism.
Preliminary results from this study, based on comparisons of the first 30 days on parole for the two groups, indicate that the control group juvenile offenders were less often arrested and received fewer restrictive dispositions for offenses. However, the differences were not statistically significant. The preliminary report noted that “the available outcome data for this preliminary impact evaluation report are much too limited for a fair test of the LEAD program at this stage of the evaluation.” It was also found that differences between the two groups were not that significant when looking at length of time spent in incarceration—the researchers found that the difference between the LEAD and control groups was between 3.1 and 3.8 months, on average (overall average length of incarceration for the LEAD group was 8.9 months, compared to 12.0 for the control group). Also, parole services to LEAD parolees were not different from services to control parolees, except for drug testing.

Cost: It was noted in the multi-program evaluation of juvenile camps by the American Institutes for Research that juvenile boot camp programs cannot be expected to have the same potential to reduce costs as adult boot camps, due to the overall shorter sentence lengths for juveniles. “Adult boot camps generally serve as a four-to-six month alternative to a much longer sentence, measured in years rather than months...Juvenile sentences are much shorter, thereby reducing the savings in days and costs that boot camps can reap.”
Summary and Conclusions:

There has been a growth in the number of boot camps nationwide, particularly camps for juvenile offenders. Also, adult camps are becoming increasingly open to female offenders, including Washington State’s co-ed Work Ethic Camp. Boot camp programs have incorporated many typical military features, such as military-style protocol and titles, barracks-style housing, and drill instructors, although many emphasize education, job training, and counseling activities. Most programs range from 90 to 120 days, with the typical state program allocating 20 percent of each day to education and counseling.

At present, national experts have found: “the impact of boot camp programs on offender recidivism is at best negligible” and “there is still no clear evidence that boot camps reduce recidivism.”

Cost savings accrue only because boot camps keep offenders for shorter periods of time than they would have spent in prison. The actual daily operating cost per inmate of boot camps tends to exceed that of prison. The key to controlling costs appears to be in the selection process into the program. New York’s boot camp program is the second largest nationwide, and has estimated a substantial cost savings and a positive effect on crowding.

Studies and evaluations that use control or comparison groups and randomly assign offenders to either the boot camp program or the control group are needed in order to effectively assess the effect of the boot camp program on post-program recidivism rates and the costs of alternate placements, and, consequently, on cost savings and overcrowding. Continuing to follow evaluation results in current studies, such as the juvenile boot camp graduates of California’s LEAD program and the adult graduates of Oregon’s “Summit” boot camp program, may provide more information on the effects of boot camps on rearrest rates, or other recidivism measures.

In summary, with the absence of effective evaluation results, it is difficult to determine if boot camp programs are achieving their goals of reducing recidivism and prison crowding, and producing a cost savings. For both adult and juvenile offenders, there are indications that boot camp improved their educational performance and physical conditioning, and created positive changes in attitudes.
UPDATE: Washington State’s Work Ethic Camp and Juvenile Offender Basic Training Camp

Implementation of the Work Ethic Camp:

On November 1, 1993, Washington State opened a minimum-security Work Ethic Camp for adult offenders, a highly regimented 120-day program emphasizing discipline and teamwork.

The camp is located at the McNeil Island Corrections Center Minimum Security Annex and can house 100 men and 27 women. Average daily participation in the camp’s first year was just over 100, with an average termination rate (i.e., percent failing to complete program) of 30 percent. While over half of the 39 counties in the state have sentenced offenders to the camp, the majority of the inmates (61 percent) are from King County.

The camp’s enacting legislation specifies a “regimented work ethic camp” with educational and rehabilitative components. The “integration and overlay of a military style approach” is “encouraged,” but not required. The program emphasizes work skills, social skills, education, and substance abuse rehabilitation in a highly structured environment. Inmate work crews perform a variety of tasks on McNeil Island, including wildlife habitat restoration, road repair, and construction.

The statute specifies that offenders between 18 and 28 years of age are eligible for the camp, provided they are sentenced to 22 to 36 months of confinement, and have no history of sex or violent offenses. Many drug offenders meet all of the program’s eligibility requirements; of the 343 offenders who participated in the camp during its first twelve months, 82 percent had been sentenced for a drug offense.

The Department of Corrections introduced legislation in 1994 seeking the following changes to the program’s statutory authority:

- Remove the upper age limit, making offenders over age 28 eligible for the camp;
- Reduce the minimum sentence from 22 to 20 months;
- Create an abbreviated camp for non-violent, non-sex offenders whose sentences range between 12 months and a day to 19 months;
- Clarify legislative intent regarding eligibility of certain drug offenders; and
- Empower the Department of Corrections to directly refer offenders to the camp, with the sentencing judge’s concurrence.

The enacting legislation requires an outcome evaluation of the camp, to be completed by January 15, 1998. Data collection on program participants is underway.
Washington State's Juvenile Basic Training Camp:

In 1994, the Legislature passed SESH Bill 2319, a package of measures to address youth violence. Among these was a “Basic Training Camp,” the state’s first boot camp for juvenile offenders. The intent language declared the legislature’s recognition that “juvenile offenders can benefit from a highly structured basic training camp environment and the public can also benefit through increased public protection and reduced cost due to lowered rates of recidivism.”

The legislation requires the Basic Training Camp to provide basic education, work-based learning, counseling, and substance abuse intervention, as well as “structured intensive physical training.” The legislation also requires intensive community-based aftercare for each graduate, and directs the Department of Social and Health Services to evaluate the program’s outcomes and report to the Legislature in 1996.55

The legislature intends the medium-security camp to hold 70 youths with sentences between 52 and 78 weeks, and whose offenses are non-violent and non-sexual. Given these eligibility requirements, the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration estimates that 15 to 18 juvenile offenders will be eligible for the Basic Training Camp at any given time. Proposals to amend the legislation were introduced to the 1994 Legislature and call for the inclusion of youth with dispositions of less than 52 weeks, and discretionary inclusion of violent and sex offenders.

The Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration is currently developing an implementation plan for the Basic Training Camp, which is due to open in late 1995.
Bibliography


Footnotes

1 Roberta C. Cronin with Mei Han, *Boot Camps for Adult and Juvenile Offenders: Overview and Update*, National Institute of Justice, Washington, DC, pp. 11, 31-33, October 1994.


3 Cronin with Han, p. 13, October 1994.


5 States with juvenile boot camps within federal, state or local systems are Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Mississippi, Maryland, New York, Ohio and Texas. In addition to Washington State, at least five other states plan to open juvenile boot camps in 1995: Florida, Louisiana, Illinois, Indiana, and New Jersey. *Sources: David Griffith, Washington State Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration; and telephone survey of state juvenile justice officials, October 1994.*

6 Cronin with Han, p. 34, October 1994.

7 Cronin with Han, p. 1, October 1994.

8 Cronin with Han, p. 1, October 1994.

9 Cronin with Han, p. 25, October 1994.

10 Cronin with Han, p. 37, October 1994.

11 Cronin with Han, p. 23, October 1994.

12 Cronin with Han, pp. 25-26, October 1994.

13 Cronin with Han, pp. 28-29, October 1994.

14 Cronin with Han, p. 53, October 1994.

15 Cronin with Han, p. 57, October 1994.
16 Cronin with Han, p. 56, October 1994.


18 United States General Accounting Office, Prison Boot Camps: Short-Term Prison Costs Reduced, but Long-Term Impact Uncertain, p. 4, April 1993.


21 Cronin with Han, p. 57, October 1994.

22 “Oregon Boot Camp is Saving the State Money, Study Finds,” Criminal Justice Newsletter, Vol. 6, No. 9, p. 5, May 1, 1995.

23 “Oregon Boot Camp is Saving the State Money, Study Finds,” p. 5.

24 For the 6 other states surveyed: Florida’s program had no impact on reducing or increasing prison beds; South Carolina and Georgia would have had to increase the number of prison beds to accommodate the program; and for Illinois, Oklahoma, and Texas, sufficient data was not available to examine the impact of the boot camps on prison beds (MacKenzie and Souryal, p. 62, March 1994).

25 Cronin with Han, p. 41, October 1994.

26 Cronin with Han, p. 41, October 1994.


29 Scogin and Lieb, pp. 5-6, October 1993.
30 Scogin and Lieb, p. 6, October 1993.

31 Cronin with Han, p. 42, October 1994.

32 “Oregon Boot Camp Is Saving the State Money, Study Finds,” pp. 5-6; This one-year-old program appears to be meeting its legislative goals of reducing prison overcrowding while providing for the successful rehabilitation of inmates.


34 Cronin with Han, p. 57, October 1994.

35 Cronin with Han, pp. 47-48, October 1994.


45 The control group juvenile offenders were those juveniles who were eligible for the LEAD program, but were randomly assigned to a control group and transferred out to other juvenile institutions soon after the selection was made. Ibid, p. 15.


50 Cronin with Han, p. 57, October 1994.

51 Bourque, Cronin, Pearson, Felker, et al., pp. 8-9, February 1995; and Cronin with Han, p. 57, October 1994.

52 RCW 72.09.400 to 72.09.410.

53 Source: Personal communication with Karla Laughlin, Correctional Unit Supervisor, Work Ethic Camp, September 1994.

54 Personal communication with Karla Laughlin, September 1994.

55 RCW 13.40.320.