

THE REWARDS AND CHALLENGES OF PURSUING RESEARCH
IN A CORRECTIONAL AGENCY*

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Research produced within the setting of an operating agency runs the risk of being subverted by the operational priorities and political practicalities facing the agency. Researchers and managers at the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) have successfully balanced the tension between the objectivity required of scientific research and the daily operations of their agency for over two decades. The discussion is framed by the challenges of conducting evaluation research, such as the TRIAD (Treating Inmates Addicted to Drugs) evaluation of residential drug treatment in the BOP and developing performance measures to compare public and private prisons.

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Working in an operating agency, such as a correctional agency, can be one of the more rewarding professional experiences of a social scientist. Most of us were trained with a bias for working at research I universities, and this is an understandable bias. Not all of us get jobs at research I departments, though, and applied settings can be a viable alternative source of employment. Nonetheless, the rewards and challenges associated with working in an applied setting, such as a correctional agency, must be carefully examined to insure that a good fit between the applicant and the job is possible. The challenges to working in an applied setting arise within the agency itself as well as from outside sources. Often, the challenges are manageable and can even be viewed as opportunities. This paper provides information about my own experiences working for a correctional agency in the United States so that others can gain insight into the working conditions of an applied job. Likewise, for those already working in an applied setting, the discussion is a checkpoint for assessing one set of conditions that allowed for objective research.

The model presented here is not the only possible model to provide opportunities to conduct good research in an applied setting. Researchers working for the national correctional agency in Canada (Correctional Services of Canada) have worked out a slightly different model. While similar in many aspects, the Canadians are more aggressive in soliciting collaboration with Canadian academics. The Canadians also publish many of their research reports in the in-house journal, *Forum on Corrections Research*. An index of this very useful journal with links to articles can be found at http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/pblct/forum/index_e.shtml. The Canadian researchers actively publish many of their findings in academic journals (for a few examples see Bonta & Motiuk 1992; Motiuk & Blanchette 2001; Motiuk & Proporino 1995). Other models for

correctional research can be found in states like Ohio, New York, and Florida, to name a few. This study, however, focuses primarily upon one correctional agency, the federal correctional agency in the United States (the Federal Bureau of Prisons).

In this paper, the list of opportunities (or rewards) associated with working as an applied researchers is shorter than the list of challenges. Nonetheless, in a good applied setting, the opportunities tend to outweigh the challenges. The discussion of rewards starts with a rather mundane consideration: (1) job remuneration, and then the paper moves to more pertinent opportunities related directly to research, namely, (2) the unparalleled access to data and inside knowledge as well as (3) the opportunity to work on real-life issues and to have an impact upon policy.

Regarding the challenges, in a nutshell, the greatest challenge of working in an operational agency is creating and retaining credibility, relevance and integrity. It is not complete hyperbole to claim that the challenges discussed are continuing opportunities to affirm the utility of social science research. The overall challenge of research in an operating agency can be thought of having several sub-components: (1) identifying the research question, (2) presenting results to a non-technical audience as well as peers, (3) resisting the urge to “answer” the question of the day, (4) working with management to set realistic deadlines for research, (5) avoiding the tendency to get personally involved in policy and program formulation, (6) knowing when to get outside “help,” and (7) retaining relevance, e.g., interest and support of management.

Additionally, there are some challenges that arise that are external to the agency. The list of significant external challenges include (1) dealing with status envy of not working at a level I research institution and (2) managing the schizophrenia of writing focused reports for administrators and broader versions for academic journal editors and reviewers.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCHERS IN AN OPERATING AGENCY

As noted previously, there are decided opportunities that correspond to working within an operating agency. In this discussion, a federal corrections agency provides the context. The discussion starts with a look at pay in the federal sector, and then it moves to more substantive concerns associated with access to data and input to policy-making.

Mundane Concerns

Many of us do not like to admit the extent to which we are driven by crass concerns such as pay and benefits, but these concerns are a reality in all of our lives. To be quite frank, operating agencies and academia both have their own benefits and drawbacks when it comes to tangible and intangible benefits. The most obvious difference between working in the two environments is the length of the contract. Academics typically sign on to 9 or sometimes 10 month contracts where researchers in applied settings typically work for 12 months of the year, but even this difference can be deceiving. One of my academic colleagues, for instance, usually quips “I have a 12-month job and a 9-month salary” when I razz him about having his summers “off.” While I think he is overstating the case, it is nonetheless true that many academics do not recover their salary during the summer months even though most maintain a fairly constant level of productivity. Having a built-in summer salary can be a big advantage for brand-new Ph.D.s who lack the experience in grant writing.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 provides a breakdown of academic and federal government salaries in 2001. The data for faculty salaries were taken from a survey of faculty in sociology departments conducted

by the American Sociological Association. While salaries for faculty in criminal justice and criminology programs would have been preferable, they were not available. Many criminologists were trained and work in sociology programs, so the data seem reasonable. The data on federal salaries were taken from the website of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. All government workers working for an executive agency are covered by the GS wage scale, unless they are blue-collar (trades) workers or high-level administrators. For example, a correctional officer starts at grade 6 and moves to grade 7 after completing a probationary period. Incidentally, many correctional officers at the BOP have a bachelors degree, making this a logical starting point for criminal justice majors. Wardens are either a GS-15 or part of the senior executive staff (the highest paid portion of the executive branch agencies). Ph.D. researchers are generally hired at the GS-12 rank if they have completed their degree. Master's level researchers tend to be hired at the GS-9 level unless they have significant experience.

The salary data are presented in several ways in Table 1. First, the data reflect the simple values of the workers without taking into account the different lengths of the contracts. Second, the data are presented as a monthly rate, with the academic rate assumed to represent a 9-month contract. Finally, the data are presented with an adjustment to the academic salaries where the assumption is that the average academic was able to cover 20 percent of her/his salary.

Admittedly, the assumptions built into these comparisons are arbitrary and not based upon survey results, especially regarding the choice of the mid-point within a pay grade for government workers and the summer coverage for academics, but they do provide a point from which we can address this issue.

First, it is probably fair to maintain the correspondence between academic rank and GS steps. Assistant professor status corresponds to GS levels 12 and 13, associate with GS-14, and full professor with GS-15. In my own case, I went from GS-12 new hire to GS-13 after one year.

It took about four more years to become a GS-14, and I became a GS-15 after nine years with the government. While I do not claim that my trajectory is the norm, I doubt that it is all that atypical. Second, as can be seen in Table 1, the actual salaries going to academics and government workers is fairly comparable at the beginning level, assuming that new Ph.D.s can cover 20 percent of their salary during the summer, but government workers generally have an advantage at higher levels. I am sure that some professors make more than government workers with contracts and grants supplementing their income, but that is probably not the normal case. Without even entering senior executive service in the government, which almost always entails significant managerial responsibilities for social scientists at least, the top pay in 2001 for a GS-15 was \$111,581. For someone in the senior executive service, the top pay was \$133,700.¹

Access

In a fictional characterization of hackers on the web, access is defined as being akin to being god. In the fictional world portrayed in *The Blue Nowhere* (Deaver 2001), access is gained illegally by hacking into the computerized files maintained by government agencies and corporations. In the real world, that level of access can be gained most easily by working for an agency (or corporation). While access is generally not unlimited, there is little doubt that researchers working for agencies have access to data and in-house expertise that is hard for outside researchers to achieve. For example, the BOP does not maintain data for purposes of research. Being part of the agency has a distinct advantage in this scenario. For the most part, there are no codebooks describing the type of flat data file that social scientists typically collect and analyze. In fact, most data, with the exception of survey data, do not exist in a flat file, and the data elements themselves are dynamic. Having access to the experts who maintain the systems allows researchers to grapple with operational systems that are quite complex in order to create data for social science analysis. Plus, the types of data available are extensive. For

inmates, the data include criminal history, prison programming, prison behavior, health needs, mental health history, prison work history, and post-release behavior. For some inmates, survey data examining evaluations of the prison experience are collected. For staff, data are available on job performance, leave use, promotions, turnover, and similar types of socio-demographic and personnel factors. In addition, the BOP surveys about 10,000 staff per year for their evaluations of the prisons in which they work.

As important as having access to in-house data experts is the ability to interact with BOP practitioners who use the data. As these are the individuals who typically generate the data, they have the best understanding of what the data elements capture and how the elements change over time. In short, the data can and have been used to address many interesting theoretical and operational questions. Some examples include comparing performance at public and private prisons; evaluating programs such as residential drug treatment, cognitive behavior modification, and prison work programs; examining the effects of prison crowding; generating forecasts of changes in the prison population; validating inmate classification schemes; studying the impact of prison gangs upon inmate misconduct; and developing measures of prison performance.

Addressing Real-Life Problems

Perhaps one of the greatest opportunities of conducting research in an operating agency is the relevance of the research findings. When publishing in academic journals, it is often easy to get the impression that the author and a handful of friends were the only ones to read beyond the abstract. In an operating agency, the number of readers does not necessarily increase, and those readers may never make it beyond the executive summary, but the research itself is often directed toward issues that have direct relevance to the agency. Often, the research has relevance to other correctional agencies and to the broader fields of criminal justice and criminology. Let me give some specific examples.

The BOP is greatly concerned with the proper classification of inmates in order to ensure public/institutional safety while at the same time minimizing the financial burden upon the public treasury. As such, inmates who are at minimal risk for escape and who pose no significant threat to the public safety are placed in institutions where traditional security measures—e.g., multiple layers of perimeter hardware and technology, high staff-to-inmate ratios, individual cells, controlled movement of inmates—can be relaxed at significant cost savings. However, since escapes from these lower-security prisons are more easily accomplished, it is absolutely crucial to have a validated classification system for assessing the escape and safety risks of inmates placed at these facilities. This is where research in the BOP has paid significant dividends. Because the classification system is accepted among BOP managers, they tend to trust the designations that flow from the classification process instead of relying upon manual overrides to place inmates in more secure/costly prisons. This has been a core area of research for the BOP for decades, and the implications extend to research on classification in other prison systems as well as the broader literature on propensity toward criminal behavior (Harer & Langan 2001).

This is just one example of research that is relevant both for the agency itself and the broader research community. Other examples include forecasting population counts to inform the strategic planning process, evaluating prison programs, and comparing prison performance. For example, a major evaluation of vocational training and participation in prison industries was conducted at the BOP (Saylor & Gaes 1997, 2001) as well as an evaluation of residential drug treatment programs known as Treating Inmates Addicted to Drugs – TRIAD (Pelissier et al. 2001). In both of these cases, the results were used not only by BOP managers when determining whether to expand or contract the programs, the studies were used to provide justification for the programs with the U.S. Congress. Internal evaluations of programs to modify inmate thinking and behavior have shown programs known as CODE (Challenge, Opportunity, Discipline, and

Ethics) and BRAVE (Beckley Responsibility and Values Enhancement) to be effective, both of which, as well as the residential drug treatment programs, are based upon developing/modifying cognitive skills (Innes 2000, 2001).

A final example of the types of research opportunities that become available within an operating agency is provided by the use of private prisons. With the increased use of private prisons and pressure to expand private beds more rapidly, the BOP became interested in comparing its own private prison operated in Taft, California to similar BOP prisons. Part of the motivation for this comparison came from the legislation that enabled the Taft demonstration project, and the BOP decided early on to pursue a two-pronged research agenda. First, the BOP contracted with National Institute of Justice to select an independent party to compare Taft to BOP operations. Second, the BOP continued its own internal efforts to develop performance measures. Since the late 1980s, the BOP has relied upon the Key Indicators/Strategic Support System (KI/SSS) developed by researchers at the BOP, most notably William G. Saylor, to aid in assessing performance at BOP prisons. Basically, KI/SSS takes operational data (and some survey data) and produces measures on which prisons can be compared. The information can be presented in a myriad of ways, but the most useful are the ability to produce results for individual prisons, for the different security levels, for the different regions, and for the BOP overall. As part of the planned development of this system, the research office at the BOP became engaged in research to refine the original “performance” measures presented there, usually simple ratios derived from count data. This research focused upon using multi-level or hierarchical linear models to account for the nesting of observations within prisons. To date, the models have been applied to survey data collected from staff (Camp, Saylor, & Harer 1997; Camp, Saylor, & Wright 1999), survey data collected from inmates (Camp 1999; Camp, Gaes, Klein-Saffran, Daggett, & Saylor 2002), and inmate misconduct data (Camp, Gaes, Langan, &

Saylor 2003). This work has become key to informing debates about comparing public and private prisons, and the methods have been used by the BOP to compare Taft to other BOP prisons on a limited scale (Camp, Gaes, Klein-Saffran et al. 2002; Camp, Gaes, & Saylor 2002). In addition, the research office at the BOP produced a report for the U.S. Congress on the growth of private prisons, their performance, their custody practices, and their training standards. A shortened version of this report appeared in print and focused upon staff issues and performance (Camp & Gaes 2002).²

CHALLENGES FACING RESEARCHERS IN AN OPERATING AGENCY

The access to data available in an operating correctional agency generally excites researchers. The ability to use that data to create products that inform not only the practices of the agency but also the general research community further heightens that interest. However, there are challenges that are unique to working within an operating agency that need to be addressed. Similar challenges are faced by outside researchers coming into an agency to do evaluation research. However, the biggest difference is that outside researchers negotiate a contract up-front that specifies how the data will be used in reports for the agency and outside the agency. Savvy outside researchers negotiate an understanding about how the data will be used. For researchers internal to the agency, the situation of how the data can be used is typically more fluid, although there is often policy to help guide this process. Nonetheless, as will be shown, the challenges facing internal researchers can themselves be viewed as opportunities and generally produce positive outcomes of their own. The challenges are less restricting than assumed by many.

Identifying the Research Question

It may seem silly to suggest that any researcher would have a problem identifying a research question, but there are two aspects involved when working in an operating environment. First, researchers must often redefine questions brought to them so that two related issues are addressed simultaneously. The research question must obviously speak to the specific concerns raised by management. At the same time, the research question should address the latest methodological and theoretical developments within the larger research community. Management does not always see the benefit to broadening the issue, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to demonstrate that such extra care strengthens the legitimacy of the research produced for the agency. The benefits of the extra rigor becomes most evident when the agency needs to justify its research to outside parties, but it is always important in ensuring that the agency receives the most accurate information possible.

Second, it is important to identify the research question in such a manner that it answers the current issue facing management as well as anticipating future concerns. This is evident in the research agenda that the BOP has pursued regarding performance measurement of prisons. Where management has generally been content with performance measures that are easily understood ratios derived from counts, BOP researchers have recognized that the ratios need to be adjusted to account for factors influencing the measures that are unrelated to prison performance. Where it takes time to cultivate an appreciation among managers for these more “complicated” measures, the payoff comes when the agency faces the need to compare prisons and defend these comparisons to outside parties. This is exactly the issue facing the BOP in terms of comparing BOP operations to private-sector operations.

Presenting “Plain English” Results

Working in an operational agency forces researchers to present their results in ways that are understood by non-technical audiences. No matter how great or significant the research

findings, if they cannot be understood, then they will be irrelevant for informing policy and operational decisions. While this can be challenging and frustrating at times, there is a benefit to being able to speak in non-technical ways. As social science has become more specialized, we have developed ways of speaking that are increasingly arcane. Being accustomed to speaking to a larger audience would help the majority of presentations at professional meetings. The more arcane language can be saved for professional publications, although even here there is much room for improvement among practicing social scientists.

The Conundrum of the Question of the Day

Working in an operational agency sensitizes researchers to the notion of lead time, especially the lack of lead time in answering important and complicated questions. The media and other sources are notorious for asking last-minute questions that seem innocent enough. Often, though, the questions are anything but innocent and straightforward, but management still has the responsibility to provide answers. In such cases, management often turns to researchers for a quick answer to the question. It is tempting for a researcher to provide that quick answer, even when one is not forthcoming, partly because it is flattering to have management come to researchers for help with a question that has been posed by a leading media organization or a leading politician. The hardest thing to do is admit that the question was not anticipated, and it will take some amount of time, an amount almost always beyond the deadline of management, to develop the correct answer. Instead, the temptation is to provide an answer that is “good enough.” While the “good enough” answer may solve the immediate problem, it is a sure guarantee that the issue will resurface at a later point to embarrass the researcher and also the agency. So, the researcher usually ends up with a credibility problem when the desire had been to demonstrate the relevance of research and the willingness of researchers to roll up the proverbial sleeves to help out. As hard as it is to do, it is necessary for a researcher to stick to

her/his guns and only give an answer that is based upon solid information. Of course, in an ideal world, it is best to anticipate the types of questions that may come to the agency and to have prepared responses. Anticipating the right questions differentiates a skilled and competent researcher from a truly great researcher.

Reasonable Deadlines

It is the rare exception in an operating agency to receive a project that does not have a deadline of yesterday, if not sooner. This is probably one of the most challenging issues of working in an operating agency. As a team player, the inclination is to set deadlines that are not realistic for the amount of work that must be done. The trick, though, is to set deadlines that do not slip. It is less frustrating to management to know up-front how long they will have to wait for a definitive answer than to push back deadlines that could not be met. In fact, legitimacy is the key aid to a researcher in this situation. If management knows that deadlines are reasonable for both the needs of management and the tasks facing the researcher, then it becomes much easier to negotiate with management about the feasibility of studies. In fact, the ideal in an operating agency is to condition management so that researchers are consulted as early as possible about the need for some study. In this situation of cooperation between management and research, it is much easier to establish deadlines that are more to the liking of management. Again, though, such a cooperative relationship depends upon trust that must be continually cultivated.

Avoiding Personal Investment in Agency Programs

Working in an operational agency can be a balancing act. The natural tendency of any individual is to want to jump in and help out whenever they feel they have something to contribute. Management, of course, encourages this tendency as their immediate goal is to deal with the daily operations of the agency. For a researcher, though, it is important to maintain the

distance necessary from existing policy and programs so that it is possible to maintain objectivity. For example, prison privatization has been one of the more hotly contested issues in corrections for over a decade. There is much rhetoric from both opponents and proponents of privatization, and it is tempting as a researcher to enter the fray to advance theoretical or political arguments. This is a role, however, best left to agency spokespersons and public affairs experts, although researchers should do their best to educate public affairs specialists about the current state of knowledge.

Management at the BOP has been cognizant of having research remain objective, perhaps because there are separate offices for dealing with public affairs and congressional affairs. It is easy to imagine, though, other scenarios whereby research would be encouraged to write position papers that would in turn be used to support the agency's position. Not having such pressures at the BOP has allowed researchers to pursue research agenda that are rigorous and as politically neutral as possible. While I am certain that not all interested parties would agree, researchers at the BOP have remained nonpartisan on very partisan issues and advanced knowledge in many areas of corrections research such as the development of prison performance measures (Camp, Gaes, Klein-Saffran et al. 2002; Camp et al. 2003; Camp, Gaes, & Saylor 2002). That is not to say that BOP researchers do not have opinions or favorite theories; they do. However, the point is to try and limit opinions and biases in designing, conducting, and reporting research. Sometimes, it is best to let others draw out the implications of the research.

The same distance is needed when dealing with policy and programs internal to the agency. It is much easier to maintain objectivity in evaluating policies and programs if the researcher is not partisan to the issue, as would be the case if the researcher helped draft policy or designed inmate programs. Without such entanglements, others are less likely to question the objectivity of a researcher. Even in meetings where the research office is represented to provide

the latest scientific information, it is necessary to limit comments to what information is known from previous studies. In almost all cases, the existing knowledge will not be sufficient to develop the program or policy at hand. In such instances, it is tempting to make the jump between known objective knowledge and the logical implications of that knowledge. However, it is not really the job of researchers to make that connection. It is better to have subject matter experts make that connection, and then researchers are in the position to evaluate the program or policy without having become entangled in the politics of making the program work or not (Katzer, Cook & Crouch 1998; Rossi & Freeman 1993: Chapter 2; for an opposing view see Scriven 1980). Additionally, such circumspect behavior on the part of researchers is less likely to alienate subject matter experts who have been known to take the view that researchers are egg-heads without practical experience in corrections.

Maintaining distance to ensure objectivity, though, is difficult under the best of circumstances. Not only are there self-imposed incentives to be useful and relevant to the agency, there are other incentives created within the agency. Surprisingly, it is not usually the top administrators of the agency that encourage researchers to “get directly involved” to show their value to the agency. For top administrators, having a research office produce products that are seen as rigorous by other top administrators and politicians is reason enough for a research office to exist. Instead, it tends to be mid-level administrators who do not always get to see the value of the products produced by an office of research. Mid-level administrators are typically faced with a concrete task, and a solution has to be devised. As such, they often try to enlist the direct involvement of research if research is part of the work group addressing the issue; otherwise, of what use is the participation of research? Such pressures are hard to resist in an operational agency without the support of top administrators.

Calling for Help

Nobody likes to admit what they do not know and that they may need help on a project. Honest self-assessments, though, are key for maintaining the viability of both the researcher and the research office. Credibility is key in an operating agency, and it is much easier to lose credibility than to build credibility. Regaining credibility is even a higher hurdle to cross. So, an admission of fallibility goes a long way to accomplishing the goals of the agency and retaining respect for research. In the BOP, we have used outside contracts on occasion to provide expertise that was not available in-house. For example, we have contracted with an outside public administration/economics expert to help with cost comparisons of the private prison at Taft and similar BOP facilities. We have used outside contractors for needed statistical and programming expertise in building prison projection models and dealing with selection bias issues in program evaluations. In all cases, the BOP received a superior product, and a side benefit was that researchers were able to expand their own skills by working with the contractors.

Retaining Relevance

There is a well-known expression that has particular relevance in an operating agency: “What have you done for me lately?” Certainly, previous work is instrumental in developing the credibility of a researcher, and managers certainly recognize when researchers have been productive over a number of years. None of this takes away from the importance of research continually demonstrating its relevance for an agency, especially in periods of cost cutting when agencies scrutinize parts of the agency that do not contribute directly to operations. For this reason, researchers and their offices must be sensitive to the needs of the agency and make this their first priority. It is easy to become sidetracked in an agency with the desire to pursue a research agenda that is not valued by management. This strategy is ultimately self-defeating, both for the individual researcher and research at the agency in general. The real challenge is to

develop a research agenda that meets the needs of the agency while addressing the larger issues in the fields of criminology and criminal justice.

OUTSIDE ISSUES

Researchers working for an operational agency often suffer from status anxiety. Given their own training where they were taught that academic jobs at research I universities were the preferred professional career, they become convinced that others outside of the applied area view their work and careers from this perspective. This paranoia shows up most often when the applied researcher receives a review of a paper submitted for publication. Any rejection or refusal to review the paper is assumed to result from this bias. While there may be some academics with a bias against applied researchers, I doubt that they are numerous or influential. Besides, good research is the best answer for dealing with any perception of bias. Quality work is accepted by peers and journal editors. In addition, more social scientists are now working in applied settings, including corrections agencies, and many academics do applied research under contract for such agencies. Along with these changes have come greater recognition of applied research at professional meetings and in professional journals.

Applied researchers do often feel isolated from their peers, but greater networking, both within and outside of professional associations, helps alleviate isolation. For example, researchers from the Federal Bureau of Prisons get together with researchers from the Correctional Services of Canada every two years. Papers are presented and ideas are exchanged to update the respective groups about ongoing projects. Several states, notably New York and Ohio, generally send representatives to these meetings which are usually hosted by the State University of New York at Albany. This type of networking reassures the researchers that there are others struggling with similar challenges and experiencing similar rewards.

A more serious problem is the schizophrenia of producing focused reports for administrators and full-blown versions for journal editors and reviewers. Even this problem can be handled readily. A focused report prepared for an administrator tends to lack a detailed review of the scientific literature and presentation of methods and results. Such information is easily incorporated into a first draft of the report, which can be reviewed internally by other researchers. When a satisfactory draft is produced, it is generally a simple matter to revise the report to fit the needs of administrators. In some cases, an executive summary is all that is needed, as many administrators demonstrate a low tolerance for reading reports longer than a page or two.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The big question that people often ask, and one that most readers of this paper would be led to, is whether working in an operating correctional agency limits the freedom, creativity and ingenuity that is inherent to scientific research? After all, I have listed some of the challenges of such an environment, and the need to satisfy management is often paramount among these challenges. The overall answer is that working in such an environment actually challenges the creativity and ingenuity of researchers. It forces researchers to set an interesting and useful research agenda within the boundaries set by the agency. Of course, the ability to do good research and to publish findings is predicated upon the support of management. For those interested in working in an applied setting, this is a point that must be investigated before accepting the position.

In the social sciences, we have typically focused upon research projects that are generally inexpensive and that have not required affiliations with national laboratories or government entities (such as NASA or NIH). However, as the funding for social science research becomes

more scarce, government agencies become more attractive for the resources that are available to support research, even in the social sciences. I would be the first to admit that my own agency has been somewhat more privileged in terms of how well research has been supported, but the access to travel, training, data collection, and hardware needed to support research has been generally unsurpassed. As such, this environment becomes a challenging and rewarding one for conducting research that is usually practice oriented but that nonetheless addresses broader theoretical and methodological concerns.

Is the environment created at applied agencies nirvana? Well, no. At the most fundamental level, applied settings do not provide the needed space to critically question the system. The tenure system and academic freedom of the traditional academy are unsurpassed in allowing researchers to examine issues that may be painful to operating agencies. But within the confines of the overall agenda set by operational agencies, it is possible to carve out space to conduct meaningful and well-done research with the active collaboration of administrators and researchers.

ENDNOTES

1. Two pertinent issues related to compensation could not be addressed with the current data. First, the extent to which faculty salaries keep pace with the cost of living is not known. Government salaries do keep pace. While the top pay for a GS-15 was \$111,581 in 2001, by 2004 the top pay increased by about 10.8 percent to \$123,682 (not counting an additional 2 percent of 2003 salaries legislated but not enacted at the time of this paper). Also, the government adjusts pay according to locality. For example, a top paid GS-15 in the Washington, D.C. area made \$127,434 in 2004. The second issue not addressed is a comparison of benefits. Federal benefits average about 40 percent of base pay, but comparable data for faculty salaries were not found. While the federal government does not use TIAA/CREF (the choice of many universities), the FERS retirement funds, in which employees can contribute up to the 401K limit, is portable, and the government matches up to 5 percent of yearly salary.

2. A more complete list of research reports produced and published by BOP researchers can be found at the BOP website <http://www.bop.gov>. Clicking on the “Links” button and then “Corrections Research” brings up the page describing the Office of Research and Evaluation.

Table 1. Comparison of Salaries

	Full Professor / GS15-S4	Associate Prof. / GS14-S4	Assistant Prof. / GS-13-S4	New Assistant GS12-S1
Unadjusted Salary (assuming academics do not teach or work on contract during summer)				
Academic	\$72,659.00	\$54,524.00	\$44,469.00	\$43,171.00
Government	\$94,415.00	\$80,267.00	\$67,926.00	\$51,927.00
Monthly Salary (assuming academic salary covers 9 months)				
Academic	\$8,073.22	\$6,058.22	\$4,941.00	\$4,796.78
Government	\$7,867.92	\$6,688.92	\$5,660.50	\$4,327.25
Adjusted Yearly Salary (assuming academics cover summer months at 20 percent of base salary)				
Academic	\$87,190.80	\$65,428.80	\$53,362.80	\$51,805.20
Government	\$94,415.00	\$80,267.00	\$67,926.00	\$51,927.00

- Data sources: Academic data were taken from American Sociological Association website, “Average Sociology Faculty Salaries by Rank, 2001-2002,” <http://www.asanet.org/research/facsal01-02.html>. The data represent salaries for faculty in public institutions. Private institutions are somewhat lower on average. Government information reflects federal salaries in 2001 as reported by the Office of Personnel Management, <http://www.opm.gov/oca/01tables/GSannual/html/RUS.htm>. Within each grade, there are 10 steps. The data in the table generally report the salaries for workers at step 4 (designated by S4), with the exception of new hire which is step 1 (S1).

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