Title of project: Understanding the Barriers to and Educational Value of Student Participation in Prison Tours

Principal applicant
Name: Danielle Murdoch
Position at SFU: Lecturer
Faculty: Arts and Social Sciences
Department/School: Criminology

Collaborator(s)
Name: Sarah Stanley
Position at SFU: MA Student
Faculty: Arts and Social Sciences
Department/School: Criminology
Role in project: Research Assistant

Part I – Project Findings

See Appendix A.

Part II – Changes and Implications

1. Changes to the project plan

We conducted the project according to our original plan.

2. Additional funding

We did not receive any additional funding.

3. Changes in my/our teaching:

I altered how I coordinated the prison tours for two sections of CRIM 343: Correctional Practice (CRIM 343 D100 (25 students) and CRIM 343 J200 (29 students)) during the summer 2017 semester. I have listed the four changes below:

1. In semesters past I have only coordinated full day tours (touring two prisons in one day) of federal prisons located in Abbotsford and Agassiz, B.C. Based on the findings from the study highlighting student concerns about the distance, cost, and time required to travel to participate in a prison tour, I scheduled two tour options for the summer 2017 semester:
   a. A full day of tours (8:45am-3:30pm) at two federal prisons located in Abbotsford, B.C.
   b. A two-hour tour (1:00-3:00pm) of a provincial prison located in Maple Ridge, B.C.
2. In semesters past I have scheduled the prison tours to occur after the term paper is due. Based on the findings from the study indicating that students would like additional opportunities to integrate their experiences in an evaluative component of the course, such as a term paper, I scheduled the tours prior to the term paper submission deadline (one week prior for CRIM 343 D100 and two weeks prior for CRIM 343 J200).

3. In semesters past students have been required to coordinate their transportation for the prison tours during class breaks. Based on the findings from the study indicating that students would like more formal assistance coordinating rides (they recommended the use of an online sign-up process), I decided to create discussion boards in Canvas to facilitate their communication and planning (e.g., who was driving versus who needed a ride, where drivers were departing from, and how many seats drivers had in their vehicles).

4. In semesters past I have encouraged students to attend the prison tours to deepen their understanding of the course themes. Based on the findings from the study highlighting that students gain extensive insight about future career opportunities, I promoted participation in the prison tours in the summer 2017 semester within the context of enriching their understanding of course materials and learning about career possibilities.

In addition to continuing to make the above-noted changes in future semesters, I plan to integrate a debrief session immediately following the prison tours. In semesters past I have been hesitant to organize a ‘debrief’ session immediately following the prison tours, as I recognize students often have other commitments following the prison tour (e.g., evening work shifts and/or classes). However, based on the findings that indicate that some students would like to debrief more thoroughly, personally, and immediately following the tour, I am going to coordinate an informal, optional debrief at a coffee shop located in close proximity to the prison. Thus, those students who want to debrief more thoroughly, in a smaller group setting, and immediately following the tour, can do so. I will also encourage students who cannot attend the debrief session, but who would like to debrief their experience, to attend my office hours.

While not a change from semesters past, I will also continue to coordinate multiple guest speaker sessions as part of my course curriculum. Their inclusion is supported by the findings from the study that demonstrate how prison tours are not always practical for students to attend but that students perceive guest speakers to be beneficial resources, serving to clarify and deepen their understanding of course themes.

4. Impact of the project on my/our activities:

No.
Part III – Sharing and Dissemination

1. Sharing findings with my/our colleagues:

I will be emailing the final report to my colleagues who coordinate tours of local prisons. I am also planning to submit a write-up for the School of Criminology Research Connections newsletter.

2. Publications and conference presentations already done:


3. Future dissemination plans:

I plan to submit an abstract to attend and present at the Western Society of Criminology annual conference in Honolulu, Hawaii in February 2019.

Part IV – Keywords for Project and Students involved

1. Keyword description of project

Experiential learning
Barriers to participation in experiential learning
Prison tours
Carceral tours
Imprisonment
Pedagogy

2. Students involved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Approximate number of students</th>
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<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRIM 241: Introduction to Corrections</td>
<td>Spring 2017</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRIM 343: Correctional Practice</td>
<td>Spring 2017</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part V – RA involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name(s)</th>
<th>Email</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Stanley</td>
<td><a href="mailto:smstanle@sfu.ca">smstanle@sfu.ca</a></td>
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</table>
APPENDIX A: FINAL REPORT – UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS TO AND EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN PRISON TOURS

Introduction

This project was designed to identify: barriers to student participation in optional prison tours; student motivation to attend the optional prison tours; how student participation in prison tours contributes to their learning and understanding of course materials; and, recommendations to improve future prison tours.

Methodology

Questionnaires ($N = 102$) and interviews ($N = 13$) were used to identify: barriers to student participation in prison tours; student motivation to attend the prison tours; whether the tours gave the students the opportunity to apply the course concepts / weekly readings; and, student recommendations about how to improve future tours (targeting the planning process and the tour itself – e.g., what we see, who we interact with, the facilities we tour) and the activities the instructor could utilize to maximize student learning following participation in the tour. Further, through secondary data analysis of written responses ($N = 25$) to a course assignment, we examined how student participation in prison tours contributes to their learning of course themes. Specific details regarding the data collection measures we utilized are presented below.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire (see Appendix B) was administered to every student Instructor Murdoch taught in Spring 2017 ($N = 145$), as they were all eligible to participate in the optional prison tours. The questionnaire was designed to examine the motivations of students who signed up for the tour, as well as the barriers that prevented other students from doing so.
Questionnaires were administered to students in CRIM 213: Women and Justice \( (n = 68) \), CRIM 241: Introduction to Corrections \( (n = 52) \), and CRIM 343: Correctional Practice \( (n = 25) \) during the weeks of the midterm examinations in each class. Completion of the questionnaire was voluntary; 102 students filled out the questionnaire for a response rate of 70.3%. The bottom portion of the questionnaire provided students who had signed up to attend a prison tour with information about the interview procedure and gave them the opportunity to sign-up to participate in these interviews at a later date.

**Interviews**

A semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix C) was used to explore student motivation to attend the prison tour, potential barriers to attending the tour, whether the tours gave the students the opportunity to apply the course concepts / weekly readings, and student recommendations about how to improve future tours and the activities Instructor Murdoch conducts following the tours.

To incentivize students to participate in the interviews during the busiest time of the semester (i.e., exam week), students were given a $25 SFU Bookstore gift certificate upon completion of the interview and were entered into a draw to win an additional SFU Bookstore gift certificate valued at $150.

The only inclusion criterion was that the student had in fact attended the full day of prison tours they signed-up to attend. Twenty-three students out of the 41 students who attended a prison tour signed up to participate in an interview; 13 students – all women – completed an interview. The interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. The research assistant, Sarah Stanley, transcribed each interview, then input and analyzed the data in NVivo10.
Secondary Data Analysis of Written Assignments

Sarah Stanley conducted secondary data analysis of 500 to 750-word written responses to an open-ended question assigned to CRIM 343: Correctional Practice students (see Appendix D; N = 25) to examine how participation in the prison tour affected student learning and understanding of the course materials. Sarah Stanley identified themes in the data that address the following questions:

- How do students who attended the prison tour (n = 15) answer the question? How does their experience appear to contribute to their understanding of the course materials?
- Do similarities and differences exist between the open-ended responses given by prison tour participants (n = 15) and non-participants (n = 10) with respect to their understanding of course materials?

Findings

As noted, the project was designed to answer five questions: Why are students motivated to attend the tours? What barriers prevent students from signing up to attend the tours? Were students able to apply the concepts / weekly readings to various aspects of the tour? What recommendations for improvement do students have for the instructor following their participation in the tour? And lastly, how did participation in the prison tour impact student learning and understanding of course material? The findings that emerged from the data are presented below.

1. Why are students motivated to attend the tours?

The questionnaire and interview data revealed students had four primary motivations for attending the tours. First, students viewed the tours as an opportunity to gain knowledge of the correctional environment directly, with many students describing the importance of experiential
learning. For example, one student said, “It’s one thing to learn about corrections, but it’s another to actually experience it. I signed up so that my knowledge about corrections can be expanded beyond the classroom” and another explained, “It’s one thing to learn about it, but to see it firsthand really does complement the learning experience.” Another student described the importance of the experience on a personal and educational level by noting the experience, “would allow me to see a new aspect of life and hopefully gain new insights and compassion. It’s both educational and a lesson for the soul and humanity.”

Second, and closely connected to the previous theme, was the students’ desire to tour the prison in an attempt to separate fact from fiction. One student described in the open-ended response to the questionnaire how they wanted to see “a prison from [their] own perspective, not just seeing/believing what [they] see from movies/TVs.”

The third theme that emerged from the data that explains student motivation for attending the tours is that the students believed it was a unique experience. One student explained how “it’s an experience that will happen once in a lifetime.”

Lastly, the students also noted how they were motivated to sign-up to attend the tour for career-related reasons. One student stated, “As a [criminology] student it is valuable to see [a prison] for understanding corrections as a career option.” Another student viewed the opportunity as preparation for an upcoming interview, explaining they “have an interview with CSC for a job coming up, so [they’d] like to see what the environment is like beforehand.”

2. What barriers prevent students from signing up to attend the tours?

Table 1 presents the data collected from student responses to the questionnaire (see Appendix B). The table documents the number of students who signed up to attend a prison tour versus the
number of students who did not sign up to attend a prison tour. Further, the table illustrates the reasons why students chose not to sign up to attend one of the tours. Following the table are student responses to the open-ended questionnaire and interviews to further highlight the most-cited barriers students experienced in signing up to attend the prison tours.

Table 1: Student Responses to Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason Did Not Sign Up For Tour</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am scared to enter a prison.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have a car to drive there.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not see the value in attending.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents do not want me to attend.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My partner does not want me to attend.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not want to travel with other students.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have to work on the same days as the tours.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not complete the CPIC form on time.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not complete the CPIC form because I did not think I would be approved.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not want to miss my class(es) that are held on the same days as the tours.</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signups full/date cancelled.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling conflicts/too busy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have already attended a tour.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want to pay gas money.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extenuating personal circumstances.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted in Table 1: Student Responses to Questionnaire, the most cited barriers that prevented students from signing up to attend the tours were scheduling and transportation challenges. Responses indicated that tour dates and times conflicted with students’ work obligations \((n = 23)\) and classes that they did not want to miss \((n = 32)\); other unidentified scheduling conflicts meant students were simply too busy \((n = 8)\). As one student commented, “I had to skip two classes just
because the only days that the tours were offered were days I had classes on and I really wanted to go.”

The next most cited barrier that prevented students from signing up to attend the prison tour was transportation difficulties, including not having a vehicle to drive out to the prisons ($n = 12$) and not wanting to pay for the gas to drive to the prisons ($n = 2$). Students commented they “have a car but [they’re] not willing to drive that far and pay gas money” and that “just getting there is quite a hassle.” This was also reiterated by students following their participation in the tour. For example, one student shared during the interview how “it was really difficult getting there… [and that they] think a lot of students could be discouraged [from signing up to attend] by all the obstacles and barriers to getting there.”

3. **Were students able to apply the concepts / weekly readings to various aspects of the tour?**

Interviewees explained how they could apply the course concepts / weekly readings to the tour, including in their deciding to participate:

I’m kind of torn because I do find it uncomfortable to go in and I feel a bit bad and I don’t want to disrespect anyone who’s living there but [at] the same time I feel like it’s really important because it’s a total institution we don’t really know anything about … I think it’s really important that, especially criminology students who this is the field we’re going into, actually understand what it’s like.

Others described how the course readings prepared them for the experience itself:

I think it was really good – we learned a lot about prison tours not just factually, but from different perception[s], and the critical side of them too beforehand, because I went in with all that in mind. Learning about the perceptions of people studying prisons and studying prisons from different views, I think that was really helpful going in and gave me a more valuable experience because I came in with prior knowledge. And not just factual knowledge, but knowledge of myself too, and I was looking at myself in the prison and how that affected the situation.
Along similar lines, another student described the importance of course readings on the topic of touring prisons as it helped them be a better ‘visitor:’

I was really mindful about what the experience was like for prisoners because there was an article about prison tours and how it could be a really negative experience for them, like a zoo animal, where we feel entitled to watch them, which I really wanted to make sure was not the case, to be respectful regardless of their situation. I tried not to stare at them or make them feel uncomfortable in any way.

Many students provided examples of how the experience helped them comprehend the course readings; for example, one student explained how it “basically helped in creating a bigger picture … everything we saw in the prison we had talked about both sides during class, so it was interesting to actually see it in person.” Another student described how:

Being able to tour the prisons and see different aspects of it … [helped her] understand concepts … [F]or example, talking about the high [number of] Aboriginal women … in prison, there are so many more Aboriginal women offenders incarcerated than there are Caucasian or any other. But then when we went to the women’s institution, to actually see the difference was insane, because you always hear about it but you never really see it, and then when we went there, I think I maybe only saw 6 or 7 Caucasian prisoners and all the rest [appeared to be] Aboriginal … So actually seeing that makes you see how the statistics are really there, you really realise it.

Students read about the experience of incarceration for staff and prisoners throughout the semester and they were encouraged to think critically about these accounts, considering how power dynamics affect the collection, production, and dissemination of knowledge. Thus, students noted their appreciation in being able to speak directly to both staff and prisoners (whose voices are heard less often). One student said hearing directly from prisoners in person “was really interesting; getting [inmates’] opinions and their ideas, from their perspective, instead of always being told [about their experiences] by the face of corrections.”

Another student explained how being able to interact with staff gave her a more nuanced understanding of course materials.
I don’t think I fully grasped and understood that concept [the concept of the dangerous circumstances involved in prison staff work] from readings until I became engaged in conversation with the staff at the institution… All of these major points were part of the course readings, but being inside an institution and getting the feel of it just gave me a different understanding of how hard those conditions are.

Students also described how their experience attending the prison tour helped them understand materials they learned later, near the end of the semester; for example, one student said:

it was interesting because then afterwards, you get to learn a little bit more each week, and put that back to what you’ve already learned from being there. So I definitely think it was a good experience. It helped a lot.

Another student reflected on how the experience connected the knowledge they have learned in courses across the School of Criminology:

I found probably the biggest thing I realised was when we were talking to two of the offenders, the one guy said, ‘Lots of people come in the system trying to change it and help us, but what happens is the correctional system ends up changing that person into being harder, mean, tough on crime, and mean and tough on prisoners as well’. And one of the biggest things I’ve learned through all my schooling in criminology at SFU is how there’s kind of a displacement between the correctional officers and prisoners, and how there’s a lack of respect basically. How prisoners are just treated like animals and treated so inhumanely especially with things like segregation and things like that, that their chances of reoffending are higher, and it’s a lot bigger of a struggle for them … Listening to one offender be like ‘Yeah, people come in wanting to change it but the system changes them’ struck home with how that’s everything we’ve learned in school, but the correctional system isn’t changing. Like we’ve learned that there are ways it needs to change in our schooling, but in reality it hasn’t changed yet.

As the statements throughout section 3 illustrate, students who attended the prison tours found the experience helped them apply and understand course concepts, thereby identifying the value in participating in this optional experiential learning activity.

4. **What recommendations for improvement do students have for the instructor following their participation in the tour?**

Students suggested five primary recommendations to improve the prison tour experience in future semesters. These recommendations are listed below, grouped by theme.
4.1 Promote tours to students as a means of gaining insight about career opportunities.

Due to the career insight students gained from the experience of touring prisons, they were quick to recommend that the instructor encourage students to attend the tours not only to contribute to their learning of course themes, but also to gain insight about career opportunities.

Students described the tour as incredibly beneficial in providing them with information about their suitability for working in corrections. For some, the tour was a positive experience, as it made them realize they had the potential to work in the system. As one student noted, “Before [I attended the tours] I didn’t think I could work in corrections but I went and saw, especially in women’s prison, I went, ‘Oh, I could do this!’” This sentiment was shared by another student who said:

[If] I hadn’t toured, then I probably wouldn’t have thought twice about going into corrections … [I]t actually offered a lot of insight to what the job possibilities are within the institution. It’s not just program operators and correctional officers, there’s … different levels, there’s behavioural interventionists … I didn’t know about a lot of the avenues that are offered just within the institution itself.

Another student described how the experience “strengthened [their] approach to rehabilitation.” They added:

it really made me see the reality of prisons, and made me grasp so much more the career that I want of rehabilitating prisoners. Seeing them, seeing the cells, smelling them, and how harsh it is, no one can heal in that environment. Like, I get that prisoners need to be punished, but you can’t heal in such an environment. It really if anything just strengthened my want to help.

In contrast to the positive sentiments shared above, other students were appreciative of having the experience before committing to applying for, and training to work in, corrections. One student explained how the tour:

made me not want to become a correctional officer … once I saw what the correctional officers did, and the atmosphere they were in – it was really depressing,
really dark – and for myself, I can’t really handle being inside an institution for however many years I decide to be a correctional officer.

4.2 Schedule more tours and on multiple days of the week.

Students made three recommendations pertaining to the timing and number of prison tours offered each semester, as described below.

4.2.1 Conduct numerous tours on different days of the week.

As noted in Table 1: Student Responses to Questionnaires, students indicated the greatest barrier to their participation in the prison tours was scheduling challenges. Thus, some students recommended Instructor Murdoch offer tours on different days of the week, as the tours held in spring 2017 were on Mondays and Tuesdays. One student indicated they “had to skip two classes just because the only days that the tours were offered were days [they] had classes on and [they] really wanted to go.”

While students requested Instructor Murdoch schedule tours on different days of the week, including on weekends, so it would “be easier to attend, no classes, and no time off work,” they also recognized they “know it’s hard for professors as well, and for the actual institution.” And other students indicated the schedule was not problematic insofar as they had advance notice to book time off work and speak to their other instructors/teaching assistants about missing class.

4.2.2 Schedule tours before major class assignments are due/examinations occur.

Another recommendation pertaining to the timing of tours is for the instructor to schedule the tours prior to due dates for major class assignments and examinations to ensure students can apply their experiences to course evaluative components. One student said “[T]he tour was too close to the end of the semester [so] I wasn’t able to use that knowledge for my papers.” Participants did however recognize the challenge of coordinating the tours earlier in the term given students must
be processed by the institutions’ Security Intelligence Offices who conduct Canadian Police Information Centre clearances for each student.

4.2.3 **Offer a greater number of tours/expand spots available.**

The last scheduling-related recommendation is for Instructor Murdoch to coordinate and offer a greater number of tours each semester rather than only touring six institutions across three days near the end of the semester. Students view the experience as a great opportunity but did not like that there were fewer spots than students as:

there are some people who miss out because there’s just not enough spaces. So I understand you can’t have like 30 kids trekking through an institution making people feel uncomfortable, but maybe if you had the possibility for everybody to go to a tour, because it definitely offers a lot more than just being able to skip out on school for a day.

4.3 **Improve transportation.**

One of the most-cited recommendations is to improve transportation to make it easier for students to participate in the prison tours; this recommendation is unsurprising given the barriers to participation described earlier. Some students recommend improving the coordination of transportation if student drivers continue to be utilized, or eliminating this method altogether to introduce a new method of group transportation.

4.3.1 **Student drivers.**

Interviewees indicated the current system of relying on student drivers to drive each other to the prisons in their personal vehicles is sufficient. However, they described the process as challenging, having noted that luck in finding other student drivers to travel with was their sole reason for being able to attend the tours, as they did not personally own a car. A few students who had to rely on their classmates to drive them found the process of asking for a ride and
coordinating their transportation to be quite awkward, as they did not necessarily know their classmates well.

The students recommend the instructor become more involved in the coordination of student drivers by creating sign-up sheets in Google documents or the course Canvas site. They recommend the online sign-up sheet allow people to input their names, the city they are departing from, and the number of classmates they can drive, with a reply option where their classmates can sign-up to travel in their car. Students believe this online sign-up sheet will alleviate stress and awkward encounters during or after class.

### 4.3.2 Group transportation.

Most students recommend the instructor make provisions to drive a bus or a van out to the prisons to ensure students without vehicles can easily attend the tours, and further, to eliminate gas costs for those with vehicles. One student questioned whether the university could assist in the process of providing transportation to ensure greater access to the opportunity for all students:

I don’t know how field trips work at SFU – but it would be great if there could be a school bus, or a more collective method of transportation that maybe Danielle could organise in the future. So, for sure if students wanted to, they could have access to these opportunities without being so stressed out over wanting to get there. I think that would make a lot more students want to go as well, knowing they have the secure method.

Another student agreed group transportation would increase participation in the tours, explaining how the institutions are so far away, so they “think if it was more accessible, like the school bus or easier transportation … it would definitely encourage people to go more.”

One student shared how difficult it was for them to ask a classmate for a ride and during the interview, alluded to feeling unsafe travelling with a male classmate they did not know:

Danielle … suggested I contact another student who offered to drive another person. And that was really difficult for me because I’m really shy. I wasn’t really
comfortable with the idea of asking someone for a ride, but I did it, and that’s how I got to the tour. I thought the person would be driving other people as well, but it was just me and the person and it was awkward for a while but he was really kind and I appreciated him doing it.

A benefit of providing group transportation is that students would no longer feel uncomfortable asking a classmate for a ride and they would not feel unsafe doing so. Another perceived benefit of group transportation is that the instructor and students could engage in a debrief – the value of which is discussed in the section that follows – on the way home, with one student saying, “I felt like we would’ve talked about it more if we were travelling together. Like, I know me and the two girls I was with we talked about it, but that was really an individual thing.”

4.4 Conduct an optional debrief session on the day of the tour(s).

Students described the value of participating in a debrief session following their participation in the prison tour; for example, one student explained:

after seeing something like that, even if it’s not something traumatic, it’s something different, and being able to talk about it and debrief and discuss it is really helpful because for some people it can be really shocking. I was definitely moved by it, but I know some people were like ‘Woah,’ so it’s good to talk about it.

Another student emphasized the value of debriefs given the questions participation in these tours elicit:

The only part of it for me that was a bit weird, was you go through this crazy experience – not crazy experience, maybe that’s dramatic, but you go through this really – you go and tour there all day you have so many questions, there’s so much happening, and then you just go home. So it seemed kind of like I didn’t know what to make of it. I remember leaving one time and being like, I had more questions for her after I left, because you have a long drive to think about it on the way home or talk about it with your classmates.

Given their importance, another student was disheartened by the close of the tour as they felt as though they “didn’t really get a debriefing from the professor or the staff there, it was more like a conclusion, ‘Hope you enjoyed, bye!’” Another student agreed, saying:
I know right after the tour we didn’t really stick around and talk to each other much, so maybe that would’ve been kind of nice. But the class right after we debriefed for 30-40 minutes which was kind of nice, to talk to everyone about their experiences, to compare, and see how it could apply to what we learned so that was nice.

The value of in-class debrief sessions was noted by another student who also expressed concerns about the lack of debrief immediately following the tour, in addition to expressing the need to conduct a longer in-class debrief session:

I [felt] like that day, when prison tours were over, everybody just left and went their own way. I can understand it was a long day. There and then when it’s fresh in everyone’s mind would’ve been nice to have a debrief. But when we had next class, and discussed it, it was nice to hear from everybody, but it would’ve been nice to have a longer discussion because there would’ve been a lot to connect to the course content.

In-class debrief sessions were also noted as being beneficial in that students who could not attend the tours got to learn about it from their classmates and students spoke about how the debrief enhanced their learning. For example, one student said, “hearing other students talk made me think more about what I saw, too” and another said:

What we really did in class a lot was discussion, and I really liked that, because [you were] able to get out your thoughts and feelings about things and apply it to what you’re learning. And I thought that really helped because we were really able to just express ourselves and how we felt about the tours afterwards, and everyone in the class was able to corroborate what you said, or disagree, and it was another way of teaching yourself about what it really is about, the prison system and everything.

The data clearly indicate students value debrief sessions. While some voiced satisfaction with the in-class debrief that occurs in the class following the prison tour, others find it lacking due to the nature of their experience touring the prisons, and would like to have an optional debrief session to end their day of tours.

4.5 Continue to incorporate guest speakers throughout the semester.

Students who attended the tour recognized the barriers to signing up that their peers may have experienced. Given their own ability to attend the prison tours, in addition to their participation in
the regular classroom setting, these students could see the overlap in learning that resulted from participating in the tours and attending the guest lecture sessions. Students emphasized the instructor should continue to coordinate guest speaker sessions – bringing in practitioners from the field and clients of correctional services – as they believe these sessions have similarly positive effects on students’ understanding of course materials. They suggested that due to the impracticality of attending tours for some students, guest speakers are a great alternative to supplement the course materials and enhance learning.

Students provided examples of how guest speakers contributed to their learning, with one student who had not attended a tour noting a guest speaker “really caused [them] to pause and think critically about what it means to work in a prison,” which was a sentiment also reflected in interviews with those who attended the tours. Another example of a guest lecturer speaking to something that was discussed and observed on the prison tours was the inmate code and how it affects boundaried relationships within the correctional environment.

The data that emerged from the secondary data analysis of written assignments (see Appendix D) indicate that regardless of whether students attended a prison tour, they used examples shared by the guest speakers to demonstrate their understanding of course materials and to provide support for their arguments. This lends further support for the instructor continuing to include guest speakers throughout the semester.

5. **How did participation in the prison tour impact student learning and understanding of course material?**

Sarah Stanley conducted secondary data analysis on student responses to the written assignment (see Appendix D) and found responses differed for students who attended a tour versus those who did not. Students who attended a full day of tours \( (n = 15) \) spoke more empathetically about
prisoners, focusing on human rights, and explicitly described – and provided examples of – how seeing, hearing, and experiencing the prison firsthand led to increased comprehension and deeper insight of course materials. Students who did not attend the tours \((n = 10)\) focused less on human rights and more on prisoner rehabilitation and recidivism. Further, these students did not use examples to demonstrate their comprehension of the course materials aside from examples drawn from the guest speakers, or other questionable sources (e.g., Wikipedia).

Two key themes emerged from the data that highlight what students who attended the prison tours learned from the experience and how it contributed to their learning.

5.1 Empathy and human rights.

Students who attended the prison tour described how it made it easier for them to imagine how it might feel to experience imprisonment as a prisoner and as a correctional officer. Students shared different examples that reflect their putting themselves in prisoners’ shoes, including one student questioning how “someone with a debilitating medical condition such as Alzheimer’s, a mental illness, or a disabled person could survive in such poor conditions.” Another student acknowledged how walking through the prisons allowed them to take the perspective of both staff and prisoners, writing:

When I viewed the conditions of the cells, the segregation unit, and yard where they interacted with each other, I could get a feel of what it’s like to work in a close, dark environment or live in those circumstances. In our readings, it did talk about all these conditions, but I did not expect to see what I had seen.

The experience was eye-opening for students, many of whom discussed how their participation challenged their preconceived notions of who prisoners and staff are, ultimately expanding their personal notions of humanity to encompass those who reside and work within
institutions. One student described a decrease in social distance between themselves and prisoners and staff:

I held the belief that many of these prisoners were horrible people who committed terrible crimes, they deserved to be there, and I should have some concern being inside the prison. I also thought that the correctional officers would be cold-hearted people…However, my perceptions changed very quickly; while walking in the prison yard and watching prisoners, I realized how normal these people are.

Students who attended the tours used terms such as “dehumanizing” to characterize prisoners’ experiences and referred to the term “rights” as being important to consider in the administration of correctional policies. A student described how some stories conveyed by prisoners in person and in the course readings are “hard to hear because these people are criminals but they don’t deserve to be treated in such inhumane ways.” Another student explained the importance of learning these prisoner stories to see prisoners as human beings rather than statistics:

Prisoner stories … force people to realize that they too are human beings …. No longer are they an Aboriginal offender who is just another addition to the overrepresentation … they are an individual who has gone through trauma, societal exclusion, and undue hardships. Without these stories, or without truly understanding the life of a prisoner, it would be difficult or nearly impossible to make effective policies.

Students viewed the visitation areas during the prison tours, which led to their critical thinking about the course readings that addressed the effects of imprisonment on prisoner families. One student realized “[I]ncarceration is not just about time lost, but all the moments and events lost with it.” Another student who attended a tour reflected upon how the entire experience of imprisonment serves to challenge family relationships, saying “The experience of going to the prison had a huge influence on my understanding of prisoner experiences because it … demonstrated the difficulties they face in maintaining family ties and living in such a chaotic environment.” This same student critiqued the visitation spaces in the institutions, describing
them as “troubling to see” and highlighted why “it ma[kes] sense why many offenders are unable to keep close family connections with those outside the prison.”

Other students wrote about the conditions in segregation with one student describing how “the segregation cells were small, uncomfortable looking, as well as dehumanizing as one is locked up for hours on end with nothing to do.” Further, some students who attended the tours questioned how the conditions they saw, including the conditions in segregation, create barriers for prisoners upon their release into the community. One student expressed how:

Being locked in that tiny space [i.e., cells] for most of the day was unimaginable…Seeing the conditions that these offenders lived in explained why so many offenders are unable to reintegrate back into society. I believed I had a good idea of what prison was like, especially from reading the Vice articles in class however; it was not what I had imagined…

5.2 Seeing leads to increased comprehension and insight.

Students who attended the tours wrote about how their experience touring the prisons contributed to their comprehension of course materials; such as one saying, “[N]othing compares to the first-hand experience of being inside the prison, interacting, and witnessing the prison lifestyle to fully understand how prison life is.” Another student described how the visual images have engrained course content into their minds:

Walking through a prison and having [correctional officers] speak directly to you about a few experiences they have dealt with provides more meaning to the articles and I feel that this theme of prison staff will always stick with me largely due to the visual learning experiences that I appreciate we had the opportunity to go to.

In addition to noting the tours contributed to their enhanced comprehension of course materials, students who attended a prison tour provided insightful observations to demonstrate how the tour contributed to their learning. For example, one student shared their appreciation of the prison tour for opening their eyes to the realities correctional staff face:
I don’t think I fully grasped and understood that concept [prison staff’s dangerous circumstances] from readings until I became engaged in conversation with the staff at the institution…All of these major points were part of the course readings, but being inside an institution and getting the feel of it just gave me a different understanding of how hard those conditions are.

Students explained how viewing physical conditions of confinement, such as segregation, helped them recognize how difficult it must be for staff who work in segregation units:

my understanding from the reading was it would be only hard for inmates spending time in segregation, but seeing how little movement [and] communication [there was], and [how quiet] the unit was, I can only imagine how difficult [it] must be for the officers assigned to that unit to spend 8 to 10 hours a day [working there].

Another student reflected upon what they had read regarding mental health issues amongst correctional officers:

At Pacific Institution, we got to talk to two guards about their experiences. They said they had experienced stabbings and violent acts in their careers, however, when asked how this affected them, they brushed it off…this may be attributed to stigma associated with PTSD …this made me wonder how many cases of PTSD go unreported due to the fact that CO’s have a certain image to uphold.

Similarly, a student said talking to officers on “[T]he prison tour really influenced how [they] perceive prison staff and understanding articles such as the PTSD article stating 36% of male officers in the federal system suffer from it.”

**Reflections: Strengths and Weaknesses of Participating in Prison Tours**

**Strengths**

We did not design the study to explore the strengths and weaknesses of attending prison tours; however, these themes emerged from the data. Three main strengths emerged from the data: the first of which is the reduction in social distance between students and prisoners; the second strength is how unique the experience was; and the last strength is how the experience promoted student comprehension of course materials.
1. Reduces social distance between students and prisoners.

Students addressed the social distance between themselves and prisoners. One student spoke to the notion of social distance by describing how this distance existed during the tour itself and how they felt about it:

Actually going back to Mountain [Institution] the only time that it really felt sort of weird and bad was when we went to the segregation cells and then we got to walk in a little bit, and all of the guys were pressed up against the glass looking out at us. And I felt really bad because I know I felt kind of guilty for being there, because they were incarcerated, they had no freedom, and then we’re just for fun going in and they’re basically locked here maybe against their will, maybe in the segregation at least, and then I can’t imagine what it’s like to have 20 students come in and stare at you and be like, ‘Well, these are prisoners’. So, I mean I wasn’t judging any of them in there, but I just can’t imagine being behind bars and having a ton of people come look at you.

Another student described how their position in life and as a university student creates distance from those incarcerated and the experience of touring the prisons served to decrease that social distance:

It’s totally different to learn about that sort of thing in a book or even in a classroom versus in actuality. I think it’s easy to get detached from what prison is when I’m just sitting in a classroom as a middle-class, noncriminal university student. So I think it’s a super important part and I feel lucky to have the opportunity; I don’t think I would have thought of corrections and prisons in the same way if I hadn’t gone.

Lastly, another student described how the reduction in social distance allowed them to think more critically about the course materials:

it probably opened my eyes a little bit especially to how inmates probably – I mean I obviously didn’t experience it in the way they did – but I think it helped me get a better perception of how [inmates] might feel, or how the status degradation ceremony where they’re stripped of everything that makes them who they are, I think I can get a better sense of what that would’ve felt like.

2. Provides a unique experience.

Students described the experience of touring prisons as a unique experience and one that contributed to their learning. As one student explained during the interview:
one thing that made me decide was that it’s kind of a once in a lifetime experience, to see inside a prison. And I wanted to connect the material that I’d learned from Danielle, and see if it really applied to a real situation. And it did. And that was really – I was surprised how much the material correlated, and it was very educational for me.

3. **Promotes comprehension of course materials.**

The third strength that emerged from the data was discussed earlier and captures the students’ belief that the experience increased their understanding of the course materials. One student said:

I think it’s always good to have a different avenue of learning something, so I think when you can put a face to it – anchor it in something concrete or an experience you have – that really helps the information sink in and it makes you remember it, or disagree with it, either way.

One student explained how the experience facilitated their critical thinking about the assigned readings on the topic of correctional officers and placing prisoners in segregation:

[During the tour, you could see some of them [correctional officers] were sympathetic and some of them were indifferent. Prior to learning about that [i.e., the assigned readings], I might have been really judgemental to officers, ‘Why don’t you care?’ But then you realise that it’s not that – they have to do the best they can do and maybe they’re protecting themselves. There’s a lot. When you’re learning about it it’s all very hypothetical, and when you’re actually talking to officers you can see some of it come out, and some of them said some really crazy stuff, and some of them, it’s interesting, you’d be like ‘excuse me?’. You learn about what they’re supposed to do and what their goals are and then you hear some of the stuff they say and you’re like, ‘ooh’.

Many students noted their appreciation for the overlap between course readings and what they viewed on the tour. One student observed how:

[Everything that the tour guide told us about, I was like ‘yeah we learned about this.’ We met some parole officers, they were just sitting in their office doing paperwork, and I was like ‘wow, yeah in the textbook it says all they do is paper work,’ and they don’t have time to go help the inmates or the parolees because they’re so busy with paperwork.

Another student talked about how the overlap in content helped them on the final exam, saying:
there are definitely sections [of the textbook] that talked about the stress of COs [correctional officers] and most of them – it was really easy to remember them all – and because they’d talked a lot about them on the tours because we did get to talk to a few COs. So sections like that for instance, I did find definitely a lot more clear and it was definitely applicable.

Weaknesses

The weaknesses were captured earlier in this report in the sections on barriers to attending the prison tours and recommendations for improvement. The three main weaknesses were: transportation (i.e., not owning a car and having to ask a classmate for a ride, the cost of attending the tours when the students factored in gas and possibly having to take time off from work); the timing and number of tours (i.e., tours being scheduled too late in the semester to use information for course evaluative components and tours only being scheduled on Mondays and Tuesdays, which limited who could attend or required students miss class and/or work); and lastly, the absence of an optional debrief session immediately following the tour to help students process a (potentially) emotionally challenging experience.
**APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE**

Danielle is interested in making the prison tours more accessible to students and improving their experiences while on the tours. Please take a minute to complete the questions located below.

**Question 1: I did not sign-up to attend a prison tour because:**

Please check all of the boxes that apply:

- I signed up (go to Question 2 below).
- I am scared to enter a prison.
- I do not have a car to drive there.
- I do not see the value in attending.
- My parents do not want me to attend.
- My partner does not want me to attend.
- I do not want to travel with other students.
- I have to work on the same days as the tours.
- I did not complete the CPIC clearance form on time.
- I did not complete the CPIC form because I did not think I would be approved.
- I do not want to miss my class(es) that are held on the same days as the tours.
- Other: ____________________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________________

**Question 2: For students who signed up to attend a prison tour; what motivated you to sign up?**

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TEAR DOCUMENT HERE-------------------

Danielle has hired a Research Assistant (RA) to conduct 20-30 minute interviews with students who attend the tours (to be completed in late March/April 2017). Danielle is interested in reducing barriers to student participation in the tours and enhancing the experience based on student feedback.

Students will be given a $25 credit for the SFU Bookstore and an opportunity to win the grand prize valued at $150 for participating in an interview.

**NOTE:** Danielle will not see the interview data until after the final grades for the semester have been approved. Further, the data will be anonymized before Danielle views it, so she will never know what you personally shared with the RA.

If you are interested in participating in an interview, please provide your contact information below so the RA can contact you to coordinate an interview.

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APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What made you decide to attend the optional prison tours?

2. What prisons did you tour?

3. What challenges/barriers did you experience as you coordinated your attendance at the prison tour?

4. How did your family, close friends, and/or network of support feel about you attending the prison tours?

5. What emotions did you experience as you drove into the prison parking lots and walked towards the main gates to enter the facilities?

6. In what ways were you able to apply the concepts / weekly readings to various aspects of the tour?

7. In what ways did your participation in the prison tour impact your learning and understanding of the course materials?

8. What recommendations for improvement do you have for Danielle following your participation in the tour?

9. Do you have any final comments or concerns to share with us?
APPENDIX D: WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

CRIM 343: CORRECTIONAL PRACTICE
WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT #4

Name: ________________________________________________

We’ve spent the past 12 weeks learning about various correctional policies and practices and the realities, challenges, and dynamics involved in the administration of, and experience of, imprisonment and conditional release. You’ve learned about these ‘themes’ from a variety of perspectives: academics, correctional staff, correctional administrators, prisoners and parolees, and families of offenders.

Consider your role as observers during the prison tours or as observers of Anonymous’ guest lecture. Per Calaway et al. (2016), Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis “argues that increased exposure to a group that a perceiver stigmatizes, when the perceiver feels safe and is open to thinking constructively, has the effect of creating less prejudicial and more open understanding of the targeted group. Thus, an experience such as a prison tour [or as a student during a guest lecture] could start the process of alleviating stigmatic beliefs against ex-offenders” (p. 434). Experiential learning experiences, such as the guest lecture and prison tour, may help address myths and stereotypes you held towards offenders and correctional policies and practices that you brought to our classroom.

How has your participation in the tour OR active listening during Anonymous’ guest lecture, affected your perceptions of rehabilitation and educational programming, your attitudes towards prisoners, your understanding of prisons, and/or your thoughts about conditional release?

Consider commenting on some of the following points: How does power play out in the prison environment? How does your participation – of being witness to either/both activities – and not being able to do anything directly/immediately to address what some might view as poor/inhumane correctional practices, affect someone? What emotions did you experience while participating in either/both activities? Did you discuss the experience(s) with anyone who is not enrolled in the class? What aspects did you choose to share and why? Be sure to indicate which experience you are using to illustrate how your perceptions have changed.

Reference: