

Sociology 131, Criminal Justice in America

Juvenile Detention Observation Assignment

The goal of this assignment is to help you understand the operation of juvenile detention, a secure lockup facility for youths. A tour of juvenile detention provides insights that you cannot receive from videos, lectures and text. The tour will not take very long. Juvenile detention is a relatively small facility compared to an adult jail. Indeed most counties do not have separate juvenile detention facilities. Statutes in all states require that juveniles be separated from adult jail inmates, and this requirement is most often met by providing a separate lockup for juveniles in the jail complex. A detention facility is locked, but provides home-like amenities for youths (Dane County's juvenile detention is called "Detention Home")--a teacher and a school schedule, special social and educational programs, counselors, separate sleeping areas for boys and girls, and usually small individual sleeping rooms, not cells.

In theory a detention facility is not a jail for punishment or pretrial detention as is an adult lockup. Under present laws, youths in most states and in the federal system cannot be jailed for offenses (there are some "sanction" exceptions). They are legally "detained" in the juvenile lockup unit prior to juvenile court action only for preventive purposes, i.e., because they pose a risk of harming others or themselves or of running away, or there is no immediately suitable home placement or alternative to home placement (relatives, foster care). Most youths will spend only days in detention, not weeks or months. Turnover is rapid. One day the facility might be crowded; a few days later there may be very few youths.

In most detention facilities you will see the youths, but you will not have an opportunity to talk with them, because juvenile law protects their identity. You usually will get to talk with their adult supervisors and counselors. Ask questions of your tour guide. Be sure you have notebook and pen for notes. Dress appropriately. Avoid clothes, insignias or jewelry that can be construed as gang or drug symbolism. Do not wear shorts, torn or baggy jeans, baseball caps or provocative clothing and consciously avoid drug or "off color" T-shirt and sweat shirt emblems. Below is a list of issues to observe and ask about:

- the specific services available to youths in the facility
- how and why youths get assigned to detention (the juvenile court process)
- how often you see the youths and what they are doing
- security precautions taken in the facility
- the attributes of youths and staff (demeanor, approximate ages, gender, dress)
- ask staff how they got into juvenile work, and how long they have done this work
- statistics: numbers (crowding) and types of youths (offenses) and number of staff positions
- sleep quarters and number of youths per room
- how this facility differs from others lockups and detention centers in the state
- how a youth's day is organized in the facility
- average length of stay and why some stay longer
- plans for expansion, remodeling or building a new detention facility in Dane County

Before your juvenile detention tour, please read Cole, Chapter 18, and *Materials, Part I*, pp. 147-163. Study the charts of Dane County's juvenile process in *Materials, Part*, pages 153-154. Read the interesting class project paper, "Why Kids Go Bad," *Materials, Part II*, page 162-164. Look for articles in local newspapers on juvenile cases, and in particular articles about the debate over building a new Dane County juvenile facility or expanding the present one.

You will write a three page paper about your juvenile detention visit that links your observations to course ideas. You cannot cover details in so few pages. Select one central theme or thesis relevant to course coverage and organize your paper around it. During the tour keep alert for possible thematic issues you can use. In past semesters students have developed successful thematic papers around such issues as the effort to create a home-like environment, the dual role of staff as "helpers" and as "disciplinarians," the meaning of isolation from friends and families for detained juveniles, and the regimentation of juvenile detention living.

An outline and then your paper must be submitted to your TA on or before the deadlines designated in the syllabus. Good writing is important. Your paper will be graded for organization, spelling and grammar in addition to thematic content. Carefully read "Class Project Paper Directions and Editorial Checklist" in *Materials, Part II*, and in addition to the juvenile detention paper, also read the other model papers that follow the directions.

II. Class Project Paper

Your paper must follow these guidelines:

A. Thesis Statement

1. The first paragraph should introduce the central idea and how it relates to your project. This is your **thesis statement** (also called the argument or position), that informs the reader about the content of your paper.. *Your paper must have a central thesis around which your presentation is organized, and it must be related to course materials—lectures, text, Course Materials, Phillips).* Your thesis is a statement drawing on a process or proposition or practice used in the course that will guide your presentation. It is not a thesis statement to say that you will describe a police ride-along, or that you will describe a prison tour or review and critique a book or videos. This writing assignment is analytic, not descriptive. To write a thesis-driven paper requires that you select from a police ride along or a prison tour or a book or videos, one important issue and render it into an assertion, an argument statement. Then using course materials and observations from your project, justify the argument. If you have trouble selecting a thesis, talk with your TA about it and attend one of the special Writing Lab session for writing a thesis-driven paper in this course.

2. The paper should provide only those facts relevant to the development of the thesis. Avoid unnecessary details and deviations from the thesis. A simple model to follow is: (a) thesis, (b) development (justification), and (c) echo thesis (a short emphatic reminder or restatement of the argument).

3. *Note: No matter how well written, a paper lacking a course-relevant thesis with proper citation will receive no more than a grade of C.*

B. Focus and Integration

1. Each paragraph should make a distinct and coherent contribution to illuminating the thesis. Each paragraph should have its own subthematic structure.

2. There should be clear and logical connections, i.e., good transitions, between paragraphs.

C. Development and Style

1. The paper should evolve by developing the thesis argument.. Avoid digression. This requires direct follow-through after the thesis introduction to build a clear, focused essay.

2. The paper should convey a feeling for the mood and atmosphere surrounding the thesis. Make your paper interesting to read. Use examples and brief quotes from your project observations, course readings, lectures or discussion group; highlight important features for a

precise and lively presentation. Papers that do not include examples and citations from both course materials and the project will be downgraded.

D. Writing

1. **Format:** Double space your paper; number pages. Leave ample margins for comments. Be sure to enter the date and your name on the paper. Select a clear, relevant title linked to your central idea. Make citations in text as needed to clarify your references. Please do not use covers on your paper. Staple the pages together

2. **Style and grammar:** Your grade will include evaluation of writing quality and grammar. Watch for misspelled words (even typos). Use a word processor spell check program. One is available on most lab word processors. Look for awkward and run-on sentences and rewrite them. Avoid verb tense shifts within and between paragraphs. Make sure there are consistencies between subjects and verbs in and between sentences, and especially watch for pronoun shifts from singular to plural or vice versa.

3. It helps to have a friend read and criticize a draft of your paper with this checklist in hand. If you have trouble writing the paper, make an appointment with The Writing Center, 6171 Helen C. White. For examples of papers effectively using course themes, see *Materials, Part II*.