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RECOMMENDED CITATION
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction .......................................................... 1
- General Structure of the French Correctional System ........... 2
  - Types of Correctional Facilities ............................... 3
- Staff Training ......................................................... 7
- Prisoner Employment ............................................... 9
- Physical and Mental Health ....................................... 11
- Juvenile Offenders .................................................. 14
- Reentry Initiatives .................................................. 16
- Comparing Systems .................................................. 18
  - Philosophy of Punishment ......................................... 18
  - Transparency ....................................................... 20
  - De-racialized Statistics ........................................... 21
  - Private Partnerships ............................................... 21
  - Physical Layout of Facilities ..................................... 22
  - Risk Assessment .................................................... 23
- Concluding Remarks ................................................ 25
- References ............................................................ 26
In 2006, drawing on previous work by the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Council of Europe offered recommendations on basic standards that should be met in European correctional facilities, otherwise known as the European Prison Rules. These rules offer guidelines for the humane and just treatment of prisoners in the 47 member states of the Council of Europe. In 2009, France enacted a correctional law that guaranteed certain rights to incarcerated individuals, including the right to obtain identity papers, to vote, to gain access to social aid, to maintain family ties, to have reasonable access to telephone services, to be offered employment opportunities, to participate in training programs, and to benefit from reduced prison time for sentences of less than five years or for convictions involving individuals who are over 75 years of age.

Despite these and other reform initiatives, European correctional administrations often turn to the United States and Canada for guidance on the effective management of prison populations. French correctional administrators express particular interest in correctional practices in the State of New York, as officials there are believed to value inmate rights and prisoner reentry initiatives. New York’s reputation for supporting research and for hosting diverse community-based organizations focused on prisoner issues stimulates interest in correctional policies and programs in New York City and throughout the state.

Officials in New York, however, have just as much to learn from correctional practices in France and other European countries. This report provides an overview of the French correctional system and highlights some of the innovations that characterize French prisons. Correctional trends and practices in France are compared with those of New York and the U.S. more generally.
Correctional services in France fall under the authority of the Ministry of Justice. There are 189 correctional facilities and 103 probation and reentry offices (services pénitentiaires d’insertion et de probation, otherwise known as SPIP) across the country. Statistics about their operations are updated monthly on the Ministry of Justice website.

As of September 1, 2011, 63,602 individuals were incarcerated in France — a five percent increase from the previous year. One quarter of the incarcerated persons in France were held in pretrial detention (Direction de l’administration pénitentiaire 2011b). Juveniles represented one percent (n= 661) of the total prison population.

In 2011, the overall incarceration rate in France equaled 93 prisoners for every 100,000 residents (Direction de l’administration pénitentiaire 2011a), a sharp contrast to the U.S. rate of 743 per 100,000 (Glaze 2010). The French prison population more than doubled since 1970, yet the incarceration rate remained significantly lower than the rate of the United States. The French rate of incarceration continued to increase during the past decade. Incarceration in New York State, on the other hand, declined during the same period (Figure 1).

Correctional costs represented nearly 40 percent of the 2011 budget of the French Ministry of Justice. Between 2001 and 2011, the correctional administration budget increased from €1.25 billion to €2.24 billion (or, from $1.75 to $3.15 billion), excluding pensions (Direction de l’administration pénitentiaire 2011a). Corrections costs in France were comparable to those in New York State, but with different prison populations. With an inmate population of about 66,000 individuals, the French correctional budget amounts to nearly $48,000 per inmate. The New York State prison system, on the other hand, housed 55,585 inmates on September 30, 2011 (NYS Commission of Correction, Inmate Population Statistics) and New York’s 2011-12 correctional budget was about $2.9 billion (NYS Division of the Budget, 2011-12 Executive Budget), resulting in an average investment of about $52,000 per inmate. This is an approximate comparison, of course, because correctional budgets are obviously used for more
than the management of inmates. The French system is centralized, however, and the French budget covers all correctional facilities in the country, whereas state budgets in the United States are only applicable to state facilities and do not include local jails, local lockups, and federal prisons (Figure 2).

TYPES OF CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
There are five general types of correctional facilities in France: maison d’arrêt (for sentences less than 2 years), maison centrale, centre de détention, centre de semi-liberté and centre pour peines aménagées, and juvenile facilities. The French system also includes 40 correctional centers (centres pénitentiaires), which combine different types of facilities in one complex. For instance, a correctional center can include both a maison centrale and a maison d’arrêt. These facilities are widely dispersed in communities across the country (Figure 3).
Figure 2

New York Supports a Higher Incarceration Rate, Leading to a Higher Per Capita Prison Budget, but Costs per Prisoner are Similar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs per Prisoner</th>
<th>Prison Budget per Resident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>$52,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>$47,727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>$49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The New York data in this graph represent all persons housed in city, county, and state facilities.

The maison d’arrêt (loosely translated as a “house where one stops”) serves three categories of individuals: those awaiting trial, those convicted for offenses involving sentences of fewer than two years, and those waiting to be assigned to a correctional facility. All individuals sentenced to prison begin the sentence in the maison d’arrêt. The facility may include a separate area for individuals who have very short sentences and who only spend evenings and weekends at the facility (quartier semi-liberté). The maison d’arrêt is comparable to the American jail. There are 101 maisons d’arrêt facilities in the country, and 39 maisons d’arrêt quarters located in larger correctional centers.

The maison centrale (central house) is the equivalent of the maximum security prison in the United States. It houses individuals who are convicted of long sentences, recidivists, and offenders regarded as dangerous. The average inmate-to-correctional staff ratio in the maison centrale can be as low as 1-to-1. There are six stand-alone maisons centrales in the country, and another five located in larger correctional centers.

Sources:
Figure 3
Various Types of French Correctional Facilities are Widely Dispersed.
190 établissements pénitentiaires


Translations:
Thin white lines indicate geographic departments. Thick white lines indicate the 9 interregional management areas. CP: centre pénitentiaire or correctional center. MA: maison d’arrêt or jail. MC: maison centrale or central house, maximum security facility. CSL: centre de semi-liberté, or semi-release center, similar to reentry centers. CPA: centre pour peines aménagées, or temporary detention centers. QCP: quartier courtes peines, or short sentence quarters. EPH: établissement pénitentiaire pour mineurs, or juvenile correctional facilities. EPSN: établissement public de santé national, or national public health facilities. UHSI: unité hospitalière sécurisée interrégionale, or secure interregional hospital units. Énap: école nationale d’administration pénitentiaire, or national school for correctional administration. SEP: service de l’emploi pénitentiaire, or correctional employment services.
The centre de détention (detention center, or CD) houses individuals who are deemed to have high potential for social reintegration. The CD may house individuals with very long sentences, as the nature of the offense is not necessarily regarded as the guiding principle in the assessment of dangerousness. Individuals usually come to a detention center after having spent some time in another facility, such as the maison centrale. One of the key challenges of the CD pertains to the aging population that is housed in its facilities, in large part due to the long sentences that are served by these inmates. There are 25 separate detention centers in France and 37 located within larger correctional centers.

The centre de semi-liberté (semi-release center; eleven across the country and another four within larger correctional centers) and centre pour peines aménagées (temporary detention centers; four within correctional centers) enable individuals to maintain employment or to participate in training or treatment programs in the community, but be present at the facility on nights and weekends. While the two types of facilities are quite similar, the latter is somewhat more restrictive and it targets individuals who require more supervision and who exhibit less autonomy. Furloughs are structured and monitored more closely in the centre pour peines aménagées than they are in the centre de semi-liberté.

Juvenile facilities are referred to as établissement pénitentiaire pour mineurs, or EPM. The management of juvenile facilities is a collaborative effort and partnership between the departments of Correctional Administration and Youth Protection (Protection judiciaire de la jeunesse, or PJJ). The age of criminal responsibility is 13 years in France, and these facilities house juveniles between the ages of 13 and 17. Confinement of minors under 15 years of age, however, is highly unusual. About two-thirds of individuals admitted to juvenile facilities in France are 17 years of age (Mouquet 2005). Correctional staff and administrators in France maintain that the incarceration of minors is used as a last resort, and only once all other options have been exhausted. In some instances, juvenile facilities may be located within larger correctional centers, especially when this facilitates the placement of juveniles in areas nearer their homes and families.
The National School for Correctional Administration in France (École nationale d’administration pénitentiaire, or Énap), a division of the Ministry of Justice, is responsible for training all correctional staff in the country. Énap is located in Agen, a small town halfway between Toulouse and Bordeaux in the southwestern region of France. One distinctive feature of the French system is that all correctional employees are subject to the same comprehensive training at Énap. This centralized training creates a sense of solidarity among staff from different correctional agencies and facilities. About 3,440 new staff members were trained in 2010 (Énap, 2011). There are two types of training courses: initial training, which covers courses pertaining to administration and management, law, security, and reentry, and continuing training, which includes a wide range of specialized courses addressing particular issues relevant to work with the prison population (e.g., criminal psychology, neighborhoods and crime, understanding Islam, etc.).

Staff members who are responsible for the direct supervision of inmates (i.e., prison guards) must complete eight months of full-time training. All training includes theoretical and practical components, the former taking place at Énap and the latter in correctional facilities. Throughout its duration, the training curriculum alternates between theoretical and practical skills. For instance, trainees spend 15 days in correctional facilities after their first three weeks of theoretical coursework (referred to as discovery training). The first stage of practical training is purely observational, but students wear staff uniforms and are integrated into prison life. This first practical training allows students to assess whether work in correctional facilities is suited for them. Approximately five percent of the students quit the training program after their first exposure to prison. The second practical training occurs at the 20th week of the course, and lasts ten weeks. In this phase, students are placed in direct contact with inmates and are granted more authority.

Administrative and managerial staff members (i.e., prison directors) are subject to two years of training. This is an important distinction between the French and American correctional systems. Unlike in
the United States, where wardens are often politically appointed or promoted, prison directors in France may not necessarily have knowledge or prior experience in the correctional field or even in management. As a result, prison directors tend to be much younger in France than in North America. During the two-year course, students receive one full year of training in a correctional facility, where they work closely with a more experienced prison director. At the end of the training, they are not assigned immediately to head a facility on their own. They work instead as part of a management team, ranging from two to five people in most facilities but sometimes including up to 15 individuals in larger facilities. The management team includes a director, a deputy director, and other management staff, all of whom have been subject to the same training but have varying levels of experience. Reentry and probation service providers, like the managerial staff, are required to complete two years of specialized training.

All prison staff is subject to rigorous safety training in fire and first aid response. Énap facilities include a simulation building, with mock prison cells and related equipment (for instance, heat and smoke generators) to simulate fire emergencies. Standard safety uniforms are necessary for the exercises, as the heat and smoke grow quite intense. There is a separate area with an observation window where other students can learn from the exercise. Staff is also trained to deal with first aid emergencies, such as incidents of self-mutilation and suicide attempts. The recent rise in suicide in French prisons (Figure 4) resulted in enhanced attention to this component of staff training. All staff members (including those whose functions do not require them to respond to emergencies) participate in exercises to understand the challenges and stresses that arise when dealing with such incidents.

In the United States, correctional training varies tremendously across jurisdictions, but no state has a training program as rigorous as the one required in France. In New York, for example, new employees receive eight-weeks of training at the DOCS Training Academy in Albany, followed by three weeks of training in correctional facilities. The eight-week training includes academic courses in emergency response procedures, interpersonal communications, legal rights and responsibilities, security procedures, as well as physical training to develop fitness, strength and stamina. Other states provide similar
training, but there is variability in the intensity of the programs. In Arizona, the DOC Training Academy (COTA) in Tucson offers seven weeks of training, and covers topics such as ethics and professionalism, inmate management, legal issues, communication, officer safety, security, custody and control, conflict and crisis management, medical and mental health issues, and physical fitness training. In California, correctional officers are required to complete sixteen weeks of training at the Basic Correctional Officer Academy (BCOA), a curriculum totaling 640 hours of training, in contrast to 200 hours of curriculum over less than six weeks in Texas.

**PRISONER EMPLOYMENT**

Access to employment opportunities is regarded as a basic right for inmates in France, and not a privilege to be granted for good behavior. As the prison population in France grows, however, employment opportunities for inmates have been reduced (Guilbaud & Auvergnon 2010). In the United States, prisoner access to work varies greatly.
from one state to another. For instance, California has never had inmate labor programs. Even in states that have had recourse to these programs in the past (e.g., Michigan, North Carolina, and Florida), they are frequently being eliminated or significantly downsized due to budget restraints. In New York, the upcoming closure of seven correctional facilities will inevitably lead to cuts in inmate labor programs.

There is one particular detention center in the southwest region of France that is extremely impressive with regard to its employment opportunities for inmates. Detention centers are intended to house individuals serving long sentences but who are not considered to be dangerous and who are deemed to have great potential for social reintegration. In this particular facility, about 40 percent of inmates were convicted of murder or homicide, while another 40 percent were convicted of rape; about 10 percent of inmates were sentenced to life imprisonment. Some inmates request to be transferred to this facility to benefit from the employment opportunities. Of the nearly 600 inmates in the facility, about 400 are employed.

In many regards, this correctional facility resembles a factory more than it does a prison. The workshops include highly modern equipment and machinery. Some of the goods produced are intended for the correctional administration (e.g., staff uniforms), but most are produced for private industry. Goods produced in the facility include woodwork, furniture, garbage bins for public parks, and even aeronautic equipment for a prominent aircraft company. Ironically, opportunities to work with aircraft parts are generally limited to individuals with longer sentences, as the work requires time-consuming and expensive training and the company does not wish to invest training time in individuals serving short sentences.

The amount of freedom granted to inmates in this facility is remarkable, particularly given that most have been convicted of serious offenses. Inmates are not required to wear uniforms. Phone booths are available in several public areas of the facility, and the inmates may use them anytime during the day. In many of the workshops, inmates carry on with their work without being supervised by prison staff. Most interestingly, many of the hallways throughout
In this particular prison, inmates may earn as much as €1,000 per month (about $1,340 USD). The income is used to compensate victims and to accumulate savings for the inmate’s future release.

The facility are not equipped with cameras. Incomes are relatively high. In this particular prison, inmates may earn as much as €1,000 euros per month (about $1,340 USD). The income is used to compensate victims and to accumulate savings for the inmate’s future release.

The employment opportunities offered in this particular facility are unique, and the availability of work varies greatly from one prison to another. Such opportunities are scarce in some of the other facilities. For instance, another prison located about an hour away from the detention center described above only provides about 10-50 jobs per week for a population of about 600 inmates. This prison is rather isolated from the nearest large city, and it is too costly for private companies to transport materials to such remote locations.

**PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH**

A 1993 report from the World Health Organization (WHO) outlining guidelines on HIV infection and AIDS in prisons stated that “All prisoners have the right to receive health care, including preventive measures, equivalent to that available in the community without discrimination, in particular with respect to their legal status or nationality” (p. 4). The key element in this statement (equivalent to that available in the community) renders the France-U.S. comparison of inmate services more complex, due to differences in health services available to the population at large and France’s universal health care policies. Since 1994, health services provided in French correctional facilities have fallen under the mandate of the Ministry of Health. In juvenile and adult facilities, inmates have access to doctors, nurses, dentists, physical therapists, and mental health professionals. Physiotherapy services are considered to be part of the basic health needs of inmates.
In the United States, health care for inmates is required by the 8th and 14th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Correctional facilities offer medical, dental, nursing care, pharmacy, and mental health services, although these services vary across facilities. Inmate health services are administered by both public and private agencies. The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) provides health care through “(1) in-house medical providers employed by the BOP or assigned to the BOP from the Public Health Service, and (2) contracted medical providers who provide either comprehensive care or individual services” (U.S. Department of Justice 2008). Correctional Healthcare Management (CHM), Health Professionals, Ltd. (HPL), Correct Care Solutions (CCS), and Inmate Health Services (IHS) are among the few correctional health care providers in the country.

In the U.S., the Bureau of Justice Statistics regularly publishes data on the physical and mental health characteristics of the prison population. One notable shortcoming in the French system relates to the fact that the prevalence of physical and mental health disorders of prison inmates, as well as the extent of participation in treatment programs, is not consistently documented. Information is not updated regularly and tends to be scattered across different sources. Most studies on the topic have been conducted by epidemiologists and the most reliable statistics date back to 2003-2004. Health data are generally collected upon admission to the facility, but little is known about changes in health outcomes throughout the period of detention. Using a representative sample of about 6,000 inmates, one study estimated that about 80 percent of individuals entering correctional facilities in 2003 were in reasonably good health, and less than two percent were deemed to be in bad health (Mouquet 2005). About six percent suffered from chronic diseases that required long-term medication, such as asthma, cardiovascular problems, or epilepsy. About one percent of the sample was HIV positive upon entry to the facility, another one percent had Hepatitis B and 3 percent had Hepatitis C (Mouquet 2005).

In 2003-04, a cross-sectional study conducted with 1,000 inmates from 23 French correctional facilities was undertaken to examine the prevalence of mental health disorders in this population (Rouillon et al. 2004). The study found that 80 percent of male and more than 70 percent of female inmates presented at least one psychiatric disorder, and most were characterized by comorbid disorders. The most
The prevalent form of disorders included anxiety (about 56 percent of male and 54 percent of female inmates) and affective disorders (47 percent of men and 51 percent of women), particularly depression (between 35 and 40 percent of the sample).

About a quarter of the sample exhibited psychotic disorders. Antisocial personality disorder was prevalent among 28 percent of the males, and 22 percent of females. About 40 percent of male and 62 percent of female inmates were regarded as posing a risk for suicide. As in the U.S., these high prevalence rates for mental health problems lead some to suggest that “… prisons are being turned into mental asylums” (Chantraine 2010: 38).

The French figures appear to be somewhat higher than U.S. prevalence rates for mental health problems. In the United States, research suggests that about half of all inmates in 2005 (56 percent in state facilities and 45 percent in federal facilities) had some form of mental health issue (Maruschak 2008). In state prisons, 43 percent of inmates met the criteria for mania, 23 percent for major depression, and 15 percent for psychotic disorder (James & Glaze 2006). Maruschak (2008) found that mental health problems were particularly prevalent among individuals who experienced substance abuse or dependence problems (74%).

A report published by the Correctional Association of New York in 2004 examined the conditions of mental health care in New York State prisons. The two-year study involved visits to twenty state correctional facilities and found that about 11 percent of the prison population in New York was assigned to a mental health caseload (i.e., medication, counseling, or both); about half the individuals exhibited serious mental health disorders (e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, etc.). The report highlighted the notable increase in mental health illnesses among inmates since the 1990s. Mental health disorders were particularly prevalent among individuals placed in special housing units. The report also underlined deficiencies in treatments offered to the prison population with mental health needs.

Substance use is also prevalent among individuals entering French correctional facilities, although their drug and alcohol use is lower than it is among the U.S. prison population. Almost one third (31%) of
individuals in French facilities report excessive alcohol use (minimum of 5 drinks per day for men and 3 drinks per day for women), and roughly the same proportion (33%) reported regular and ongoing use of illicit substances in the previous year. More than three-quarters (78%) of individuals smoked cigarettes on a daily basis (Mouquet 2005). The same behaviors were prevalent among juveniles as well, with 70 percent reporting cigarette smoking and 20 percent with excessive drinking habits (Mouquet 2005).

A 2006 report by Mumola and Karberg found that 53 percent of state and 45 percent of federal inmates in the United States met the DSM-IV criteria for drug dependence (characterized by tolerance, withdrawal, compulsive use, impaired control, time spent obtaining, using and recovering, neglect of activities, and continued use despite problems) or abuse (failure to fulfill major role obligations, continued use in hazardous situations, drug-related legal problems, and recurrent social or interpersonal problems). In New York State, the Department of Correctional Services (2008) reported that 83 percent of the inmate population exhibited substance abuse needs, but the Correctional Association of New York (2011) posited that the definition of substance abuse was too broad and that the State would benefit from better assessments of treatment needs.

JUVENILE OFFENDERS

Over the course of the past decade, due to rising rates of juvenile delinquency in France, the Ministry of Justice has been investing increasing funds in juvenile correctional facilities (i.e., établissement pénitentiaire pour mineurs, or EPM), with an emphasis on “educational detention” which aims to “resocialize” juveniles in order to ensure a successful reintegration into law-abiding lifestyles (Solini 2010). In 2010, the government invested 516 million euros in the supervision of juvenile delinquents (up from 490 million euros in 2009; see DPJJ 2009). The budget targeted 92,000 youths supervised by the Youth Justice Protection (Protection judiciaire de la jeunesse, PJJ), including 5,500 removed from their homes (DPJJ 2009).

One juvenile facility located in the southwestern region of France illustrates the extent to which resources were invested in juvenile
offender programs. This particular facility could house 60 youths, though only 40 youths were housed in the facility on one particular day in 2011. For these 40 youths, the facility employed 60 supervision staff, 36 educators, 2 technical teachers, and one cultural coordinator who managed the media center. The equipment and resources in the facility were impressive. These included a theater room, a media library equipped with extensive books and movies, an internet room (with restricted access to websites), classrooms equipped with computers, a fully equipped gym with music and air conditioning, and a large indoor area for various sports (badminton, soccer, and basketball).

Juveniles gradually progress through five units throughout the duration of their stay in the facility. The first unit, where the youth spends 5-10 days, is used to assess the individual’s needs upon admission to the facility. During this period, there is limited access to group programs. As the youths progress through the units, there is increased exposure to group activities and classes. The last phase of the stay in the juvenile facility, placement in the fifth unit (also referred to as the trust unit, or unité de confiance), occurs towards the end of the sentence. Throughout units 2-5, the youths participate in various educational classes and/or sports activities.

The use of isolation is uncommon in French juvenile facilities. If youths misbehave, they generally spend additional time in their assigned living unit rather than being placed in isolation. Solitary confinement is regarded as a violation of the mandate of juvenile facilities. Problem behaviors include making threats or the use of insults toward the staff, possession of cigarettes, and physical aggressiveness. Punishment for these behaviors includes writing apology letters, washing dishes, or being assigned to other similar tasks.
There is a separate unit for girls, which also houses some young children in an effort to avoid separating mother and child. The cells that house the girls and their children are large in size, about 250 square feet. The unit includes a laundry room where the young mothers can do their own laundry. The atmosphere in the unit is somewhat cheerful, with the walls and cell doors painted in bright colors. The supervision staff is also extremely mindful not to violate the privacy of the young mothers and children. In many ways, the administration attempts to create an environment for the youths that resembles life on the outside. The physical layout is not too dissimilar from that of housing complexes in suburban areas of Paris.

**REENTRY INITIATIVES**

Reentry services fall under the authority of the *services pénitentiaires d’insertion et de probation* (reentry and probation correctional services, or SPIP). Created in 1999, this division of Correctional Services overlooks all matters pertaining to the social reintegration of individuals as they are released from prisons as well as probation and community services. The mission statement of the SPIP emphasizes the concepts of social integration and reintegration, highlighting the need to better socialize individuals who were never adequately integrated into society prior to serving time in prison. The guiding principles of the SPIP revolve around respect for the victims, for society and for the offenders, and prevention of recidivism is one of its explicit goals.

The French correctional administration recognizes the crucial importance of maintaining inmates’ ties to their families during the confinement period in order to ensure a successful transition back to the community after release. The administration relies on several practices to maintain these ties, such as the possibility for children under 18 months to stay with their mothers in the correctional facilities and the improvement of spaces allocated to family meetings and play areas for children. Individuals in pretrial detention are entitled to three visits per week, and convicted inmates have a right to at least one visit per week.
One of the most progressive practices in reentry, which is becoming increasingly prevalent in French prisons, is the use of family life units (unités de vie familiale), pseudo-apartments inside the compound of correctional facilities where inmates spend up to 72 hours with spouses and children. The spaces are relatively large; the UVF spaces the first author visited in 2011 were approximately 43 meters square (roughly 460 square feet, about the size of a small studio apartment). Generally targeted toward but not limited to inmates serving longer sentences, the objective of the UVF is to enable inmates to reconnect with their families. Criminological research stresses the negative effects of incarceration on family relationships (see Sampson and Laub’s 1997 theory of cumulative disadvantage). The importance of maintaining family ties in reentry efforts is highlighted in numerous studies on the reintegration process of formerly incarcerated individuals (Laub and Sampson 2001; Travis 2005; Travis and Petersilia 2001).

Prison guards do no enter the “private” apartment; they only supervise the area surrounding it. The first visit lasts around six hours; subsequent visits can last 24, 48, and finally 72 hours if all runs smoothly. Inmates are immediately eligible for participation in the UVF upon their admission to the facility, and can request to use the units once every two months. Some of the UVFs even include an outside yard and playpen for children. The administrative and supervision staff members in the correctional facilities were often apologetic for what would seem—from an outsider’s perspective—to be minor shortcomings, such as the lack of sunlight inside the units.
Observational data from the UVF experience has shown that inmates have difficulty adapting to a space other than their prison cell, even within the parameters of the correctional facility; this is particularly true for individuals serving long sentences. These issues are of course enhanced when individuals are released to the community and return home, and the UVF may help to facilitate this transition after prison. However, the UVFs may also have adverse effects on some individuals. Rambourg (2009) investigated the effectiveness of the UVF, and argued that the family life units may create more confusion and maladjustment for individuals serving life sentences, as they are asked to regularly alternate between the role of responsible spouse and father to that of submissive inmate. The structure and prevalence of UVFs has changed tremendously in recent years, and assessments of their effectiveness with contemporary samples are needed.

The key feature that distinguishes the philosophy of punishment in French and American corrections relates to the idea that access to these family life units is deemed to be a right, and not a privilege. Individuals are eligible to request access to the UVF immediately after their admission to the facility. In principle, good behavior is not a sufficient condition for access to the UVF. In some instances, inmates who are defiant and who exhibit problem behavior are prime candidates for the UVF. The administration regards these individuals as disoriented in their new surroundings, and believes that time spent with their families may improve their adjustment, attitudes and behaviors.

**COMPARING SYSTEMS**

While there is a degree of variability in correctional policies and practices across state jurisdictions in the U.S., many general observations and points of comparison with regard to trends in French correctional practices are especially relevant to New York.

**PHILOSOPHY OF PUNISHMENT**

The French philosophy of punishment emphasizes the principle of harm reduction—the idea that the goal of punishment is to reduce or mitigate the harmful effects of future crime. The deprivation of freedom is a means to that end, and not a goal in and of itself. Harm reduction also extends to the victims, which is why French prisons emphasize the continued social capital and employment potential of
prisoners who earn money during their incarceration in order to pay restitution to victims. With a law enacted in November of 2009, most inmates (with some exceptions) were granted the rights to obtain identity papers, to vote, to get married or register in civil unions, and to obtain public assistance funds while incarcerated. These measures were put in place to create inmate living conditions that resemble those of ordinary citizens and to facilitate the eventual transition of inmates back into the community. Public assistance funds are also sometimes used to prevent inmates from losing their homes while incarcerated. Other practices illustrate this attempt to create a life in prison that most resembles life on the outside. In some facilities, the same cultural events available in nearby communities are offered in prison as well (music, dance, theater, etc.).

The French system may appear quite progressive from a U.S. perspective. Yet, some individuals working in the French justice system, including researchers and corrections staff, regard their own policies as overly punitive. Thus, it comes as no surprise that even the most liberal practices in the United States are regarded as very conservative from a French point of view, and that some correctional practices adopted in the United States are regarded as highly excessive by French professionals.

As the first author presented an overview of the American correctional system to Ministry of Justice staff and students, they were astounded by the Pew Center’s (2009) report showing that one in 31 adults (and one in 11 Black adults) in the United States were under some form of correctional control, as well as the fact that the U.S. incarcerates large numbers of individuals who do not pose a threat to the community. The pervasive use of isolation in American prisons is disturbing to
French correctional officials, and they are equally surprised by the number of jurisdictions in the U.S. that try juveniles as adults and place them in facilities with adult inmates. European justice workers find it difficult to believe that some states like Arizona charge visitors to their prisons a one-time fee of $25 for background checks, a practice that has been challenged and regarded as a tax on an already vulnerable population.

These practices are simply incompatible with the philosophy of punishment demonstrated by the policies and practices of French corrections agencies. In 2011, when the Dominique Strauss-Kahn case was in the headlines (i.e., the former director of the IMF was accused of sexually assaulting a hotel employee), French correctional staff expressed their astonishment at the hasty deprivation of freedom and public humiliation to which the accused was subjected. In particular, the stigmatization caused by the media and the publication of photos of DSK in handcuffs was highly offensive to European justice professionals, especially given that the case was subsequently dismissed.

Another clear distinction between France and the United States relates to their apparent standards for the just treatment of prisoners. The existence and enforcement of standards varies greatly across states in the U.S., but French correctional facilities are continually updated and brought up to code according to the Council of Europe guidelines. Certification signs for the RPE (Règles pénitentiaires d’Europe, or European Prison Rules) are displayed throughout prisons. Even cells in arrival quarters (quartiers arrivants) in most correctional facilities conform to European rules (i.e., they include a fridge, television, shower, and toilet with a small door separating it from the rest of the cell).

TRANSPARENCY
One of the most innovative practices in French corrections pertains to the use of external assessors. These are regular citizens, representatives of the community at large, who visit correctional facilities and offer an assessment of living conditions in prisons. This practice was implemented in June of 2011, and illustrates the French government’s attempt to create more transparency in its correctional practices.
In New York, while not directly comparable to the French practice of external assessment, the Citizen’s Policy and Complaint Review Council has the responsibility of overseeing the inmate complaint and grievance process. The council consists of civilians appointed by the governor: one Vietnam war veteran or licensed mental health professional with expertise in post traumatic stress disorder, an attorney, a former inmate, a former resident of the Office of Children and Family Services and a former employee at OCFS (Beilein, Stewart and Harrison-Ross 2011).

DE-RACIALIZED STATISTICS
In contrast to the French support for transparency in prison operations and living conditions, the French Ministry of Justice does not authorize the publication of information about the racial background of the justice-involved population. Government reports suggest that 82 percent of the individuals processed in the nation’s criminal justice system are of French citizenship, and the country of origin for the remaining 18 percent is publicly available (Direction de l’administration pénitentiaire, 2011a). Statistics on the racial and ethnic backgrounds of French citizens, however, are not made public on the grounds that they would result in greater stigmatization and discrimination against groups that may be over-represented in the prison population. This is very different from correctional information published in the United States, which often emphasizes the over-representation of minority groups in the prison population. Whether the publication of racially-specific data would lead to greater discriminatory practices is a question worth exploring.

PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS
In France, the administration of correctional facilities and supervision of inmates falls under the authority of the Direction of Correctional Administration. The private sector may be used for specific services in prisons, such as food, transportation, and maintenance. French prison facilities, however, cannot be entirely managed by private corporations. In the U.S., privatization is more common and praised by some officials as a means of reducing correctional costs. The state and federal governments offer a fixed daily amount to private companies for each inmate under their supervision. Thus, profits can vary with the number of inmates and their lengths of stay in prison. This creates a potentially harmful incentive to keep the private facilities at full capacity and it can be difficult for states and the federal government to monitor the quality of services in such facilities.
A comparative analysis of public-private partnerships in the prisons of France, Brazil and America suggested that a key difference was that some U.S. prisons are fully privatized while prisons and prison-related services in France and Brazil are only partially privatized (Cabral and Saussier 2011). French prisons that are in partnership with private companies remain under the authority of the Correctional Administration. Private facilities in the United States may receive revenue from public contracts, but their management and operations are independent. In such arrangements, inmate needs are not always regarded as a top priority. Cabral and Saussier found that private sector involvement seemed to improve the quality of services and reduce costs in Brazil, while it improved the quality of services but increased costs in France. In the U.S., privatization reduced costs but also reduced the quality of services. The role of the private sector in the administration of correctional facilities is one of the features that most distinguishes the quality of prison services in France and the United States.

PHYSICAL LAYOUT OF FACILITIES
Prison cells in France (even solitary confinement cells) are often significantly larger than in U.S. facilities. New facilities that abide by European Prison Rules are about 9 square meters (roughly 97 square feet). Prison cells in the United States vary considerably in size and it is difficult to obtain average figures, but they tend to be smaller than the cells of French prisons. Correctional administrators in New York estimate that the average prison cell in the State includes about 60 square feet of usable space, and this estimate does not account for overcrowding and the possibility that two or more inmates will share a cell for extended periods of time.

Overcrowding was not a significant problem in the French facilities visited by the first author. Located in provincial regions, most of these prisons seldom reach full capacity. Facilities in the Paris region, on the other hand, can become crowded. Even in France’s most crowded facilities, however, the problem does not reach the scale of crowding seen in some U.S. prisons. The ratio of inmates-to-staff is also impressive in France: about 2.5 inmates per prison guard, and even 1-to-1 in the maisons centrales (equivalent of maximum security facilities).
In many French correctional facilities, each individual cell has its own shower and toilet. Some facilities include a small kitchen on each floor, providing inmates the opportunity to cook their own meals. The section of the prisons dedicated to female inmates includes fully equipped nurseries and access to laundry facilities. Cells have solid doors and in some facilities, inmates may be granted the right to lock and unlock their own cell doors. Correctional staff in France believe that solid cell doors are important for maintaining an inmate’s right to privacy.

The quality and range of activities offered to French inmates is impressive from a U.S. perspective. Athletic activities are available in all facilities, though soccer pitches are far more common than the basketball courts commonly found in U.S. facilities. In many of the facilities visited by the author, inmates had access to yoga, musical instruments, and various art supplies.

**RISK ASSESSMENT**

French correctional staff and administrators observe a distinction between “criminological danger” and “correctional danger.” Criminological danger refers to the probability that an offender will commit a new crime when released into the community. This notion of risk is measured by the more common risk assessment tools used in the U.S., including the Salient Factor Risk Instrument, COMPASS, STATIC 99, RAZOR, LSI-R and LSI-SV. Correctional danger refers to the threat that an individual offender poses to correctional staff and to the balance and order of facilities (e.g., violence directed towards oneself or others, escape risk, instigating collective action within the facility, etc.; see Mbanzoulou 2010).

Similar language is used in the U.S. correctional system. In the United States, inmate classification systems are used to assess correctional risk, and assessments of criminological risk are most often conducted at the parole and reentry stage. Before 1980, few states, with the notable exception of California, used objective classification systems in prisons. All states now employ these systems. The program statement of the Federal Bureau of Prisons’ Inmate Security Designation and Custody Classification asserts that the assignment of inmates to particular facilities should rely on three major factors: “the level of security and supervision the inmate requires; the level of security and staff supervision the institution is able to provide; and, the inmate’s program needs.”
Classification systems may not involve public risk factors, focusing instead on identifying prisoners who are at risk for escape or who may pose a risk for facility management. Individual classification scores are also used to determine a prisoner’s type of custody (i.e., minimum, medium, closed/maximum, or Level I, II, III, IV, etc.). Although there is some overlap in the factors used for community and prison risk assessment, other factors are relevant in only one form of assessment or the other. In prison classification, the prisoner’s employment and marital status are not pertinent, and age at first arrest and criminal peer group associations are not predictive of prison conduct.

One underdeveloped dimension in French corrections pertains to needs assessments and treatment planning. In the early stages of detention, some form of evaluation is conducted by a designated committee (consisting of the facility director, the detention officer, the reentry and probation officer, as well as medical and teaching staff) to conduct an assessment of the inmate and determine the type of facility that best corresponds to his/her needs. However, this is not an actuarial process. Initial evaluations in the maison d’arrêt (jail) and subsequent assessments conducted in the correctional facilities where sentences are to be served are viewed as a tool to develop a plan for the inmate’s activities during the stay in prison (i.e., educational and professional training) rather than as a treatment plan.

The correctional administration is only just beginning to develop programs emphasizing the prevention of recidivism, but this is not yet a mandatory practice in French correctional facilities. The administration is turning to neighboring European countries, and also to Canada and the United States, to learn more about treatment and intervention programs in prisons. In North America, needs assessments tend to be more comprehensive than in France and often include medical and mental health screenings, as well as information pertaining to the individual’s background (health, family, employment, education, and criminal record). In the United States, of course, there is a great deal of variation across facilities and between states in the use of needs assessment and other practices.
CONCLUSION

Despite many differences between French and American correctional practices, the two countries also have common challenges in the management of prison populations. Michel and colleagues (2008: 25) summarized some of the significant barriers that arise in French prisons, and which mirror issues in U.S. corrections:

... access to care is still inadequate and services increasingly stretched by an ever growing prison population and the high prevalence of co-existing severe mental and other health and social problems which exacerbate the difficulties in providing a comprehensive health approach in prison settings ... The large gap in France between health prevention and treatment services in the community and the equivalent services for prison inmates cannot be defended.

This report offers a brief overview of the French prison system and the elements of that system that stand in contrast to the policies and practices of corrections agencies in the United States. More detailed comparisons, of course, are needed. Cross-national comparisons of correctional systems and collaborative work involving professionals and administrators in different parts of the world are mutually beneficial endeavors, enabling participants to learn about the most innovative and effective practices in the management of prison populations. International comparisons and collaborations may also lead to the development of clearer standards for the humane treatment of prisoners, a uniquely vulnerable population.
REFERENCES


The Research and Evaluation Center at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, is an applied research organization established in 1975 to provide members of the academic community of John Jay College with opportunities to respond to the research needs of justice practitioners in New York City, New York State, and the nation. The Center operates under the supervision of the Office for the Advancement of Research at John Jay College of Criminal Justice.