Study to examine local recidivism reduction program

Criminal Justice professors Jennie Singer and Yvette Farmer are conducting a research project that could help change the way county and law enforcement officials choose to reduce the high recidivism rate among low-level offenders.

Singer, a clinical psychologist with nine years’ experience in the federal and state prison systems, and Farmer, who specializes in evaluation and research methods, are examining Ascend, a Sacramento-based program designed to change the behavior of criminal offenders so they are not recycled through the costly system.

The recidivism rate in California is about 66 percent.

The Ascend program was established in 2011 to devise a street-smart behavioral modification that makes a difference in the lives of repeat offenders. The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors and the Sheriff’s Department signed a contract with Sacramento State to evaluate the Ascend program’s progress.

Ascend was started by defense attorneys Toni Carbone and Christine Galves. Their straight-talking, tough-love approach has thus far in a small sample size produced a 10 percent recidivism rate. Sacramento News and Review reports that Tim Sanders, who has gone through the Ascend rehabilitation program, said the program “makes you want to do what you’re supposed to do.”

Singer, who helped develop Ascend’s curriculum, finds herself in a far different role as an unbiased researcher. “Our responsibility is to gather data on the program … and then evaluate it to determine if it is getting cost-effective results,” she says, adding a report is expected to be completed by next spring.

The overarching question is whether a program like this can make a difference in the revolving door of recidivism that is costing California billions of dollars. Sacramento State’s study is designed to help answer that question.

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