

To: Professor Behm  
From: Lauren Vana  
Date: October 25, 2018  
Subject: Proposal for Research on Nebraska Prisons Overcrowding

### **Purpose**

The purpose of my proposal is to request authorization to study the overcrowding problem in the Nebraska prison system. In this proposal, I explain why prison overcrowding is a significant problem and outline my proposed research plan.

### **Summary**

In this report, I propose to research the problem of overcrowding within the Nebraska state prison system. Prison overcrowding is an issue many state systems deal with and Nebraska is no exception. Overcrowding can endanger the prison staff and inmates, negatively affect the health of inmates, and negatively affect the rehabilitation of inmates. This proposal provides a preliminary examination of overcrowding in the Nebraska state prison system. Furthermore, the proposal presents a proposed program of future research that includes the following: 1) research the extent of the overcrowding crisis in the Nebraska state prison system, 2) research strategies other state prison systems have used to combat this problem, 3) evaluate these strategies based on success rate, cost, and timeliness, 4) modify strategies to best fit the Nebraska state prison system, and 5) write a recommendation report based on my research. My previous research on this subject, my interest in this subject, and the fact that I have been living in Nebraska all my life qualify me to do this research plan.

### **Introduction**

Prison overcrowding is a problem across the United States, and has reached high levels in the Nebraska state prison system. On average during the second quarter of 2018, Nebraska prisons held 5,263 inmates daily, which is 156 percent of capacity, or 1,900 more inmates than the prisons are designed to hold (Hammel). According to the Nebraska Department of Corrections website, one facility is at nearly 300 percent design capacity, and many facilities are over 180 percent design capacity (NDCS). The inspector general's report on the State Penitentiary facility revealed two dormitories that both hold double their 100 inmate capacity. The entire facility currently holds 600 more inmates than it is designed to hold, and is one of the most overcrowded prisons in the Nebraska system. Prison overcrowding in Nebraska has been a persistent problem for years, even after the 2015 overhaul of criminal sentences that was expected to reduce the prison population. According to state officials, reforms on sentencing and parole systems developed by the state in conjunction with the Justice Center of the Council of State Governments have failed to significantly reduce prison population (Hammel).

There are many examples of issues in the Nebraska state prison system that demonstrate the significance of the problem of prison overcrowding. The inspector general's report on the Nebraska State Penitentiary included "an unscientific survey of staff that indicated that more than half felt unsafe coming to work, and nearly 80 percent would not recommend the job to a friend or family member" (Hammel). The ACLU of Nebraska has also filed a lawsuit against the Nebraska Department of Corrections alleging that the overcrowding of Nebraska prisons has

caused substandard health and mental health care, unsafe conditions for staff, and “needless suffering and death” of inmates. According to the ACLU this has resulted in a suicide rate in state prisons that is 30 percent higher than the national average and two deadly riots that killed four inmates and injured several employees. Additionally, double bunking solitary confinement cells allegedly contributed to the murder of an inmate by his cellmate (*Sabata v. NDOC*). Not only are these incidents alarming, but the lawsuit itself demonstrates the significance of this issue.

Many studies across the country also demonstrate how overcrowding can be extremely harmful to both inmates and officers. For inmates, overcrowding can be detrimental to their health, safety, and rehabilitation. According to Meredith P. Huey and Thomas L. McNulty from the University of Georgia, studies reveal “deficient medical attention, diminished security, lack of access to rehabilitation programs, and relentless idleness as primary correlates of overcrowding” (Huey). They also write that research “[supports] the hypothesis that the stress of crowding—and the accompanying struggles for resources, space, and autonomy—create atmospheres that impede inmate adaptation to prison life and increase the likelihood of suicide” (Huey). Further studies show that crowding also causes cramped sleeping quarters, loss of inmate privacy, elimination and violation of recreational and personal spaces (Martin). Other research has shown that prison overcrowding also harms correctional officers. A study conducted by the University of Alabama, the University of North Texas, Coastal Carolina University, and the Tuscaloosa Sheriff’s office, researched 66 correctional officers at 3 Alabama men’s prison to find the effect of overcrowding on the officers. All officers responded that crowding affected officer safety and led to increased violence. Almost two thirds associated crowding with stressful working conditions. Nearly three fourths said crowding was stressful for inmates as well (Martin). Additional studies note that crowding leads to “frayed tempers, sloppy work, and inability to handle inmates [calmly]” (Martin). All of these studies demonstrate how overcrowding does not allow prisons to work effectively and safely.

The sources that I have consulted to research this issue include articles from the Omaha World-Herald reporting on overcrowding and issues in the Nebraska prison system and the ACLU lawsuit against the Nebraska Department of Corrections, the Nebraska Department of Corrections website, the ACLU of Nebraska case and complaint, and various academic research works that study effects of overcrowding in prisons on inmates and staff. I will use these sources to 1) research extent of overcrowding in the Nebraska prison system comparatively with other state systems, 2) research strategies other states have used to combat this problem, 3) evaluate these strategies, 4) modify strategies to best fit the Nebraska prison system’s needs, and 5) write a recommendation report that will recommend a strategy to combat overcrowding in the Nebraska prison system.

This proposal contains my proposed program plan, which outlines my research plan, and details what research has been done and what further research still needs to be done. It also describes how I will evaluate and draw conclusions from my research.

## **Proposed Program**

### *1. Research Extent of Overcrowding in the Nebraska Prison System*

This step has already begun with the preliminary research that I have introduced. With this research, I have an understanding of the extent of Nebraska's problem. The state prison system is currently at 156 percent design capacity, and the problem has only worsened with time. I have also done research on neighboring states, like Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Illinois. According to the Iowa Department of Corrections website, Iowa is currently at 123.62 percent capacity, or 1,114 inmates over capacity (Daily). Kansas, according to the Kansas Department of Corrections 2017 annual report, is nearly 2,000 inmates under capacity (Norwood). According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Missouri state prison system is at 105 percent capacity (Bogan). Illinois, in 2015, was at 147.9 percent capacity, according to the Illinois Policy Institute (Jackson-Greene).

Further research can be done on Colorado, Minnesota, and other nearby states. This information will help me get a sense of how severe Nebraska's overcrowding issue is and to find comparable state systems to see what they are currently doing to combat the problem, which will assist me in the next task.

### *2. Research Strategies Other States Have Used to Combat This Problem*

My research so far has gathered information from previous strategies Nebraska and Illinois have used to try to reduce state prison overcrowding. One strategy Nebraska has utilized is building more space to relieve overcrowding. Nebraska state prisons added 100 beds in late 2017 and will add 100 more in 2018, as part of a plan to add 660 total beds. Money has also been set aside to build additions for elderly and mentally ill inmates. Additionally, lawmakers passed laws that would allow for early release of inmates who are terminally ill, and temporary housing of inmates at county facilities (Williams).

Illinois passed sentence reform laws that allowed inmates to be jailed locally instead of going to state prison. It also "allows state prison officials to give 'supplemental sentencing credits' that offer an expanded group of inmates reduced prison stays for taking part in rehabilitation programs behind bars" (Brady-Lunny). The law also repealed mandatory prison sentences for some offenses, mostly drug related crimes (Brady-Lunny).

I will continue to research strategies that have been implemented by nearby states, like Iowa, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, and Minnesota. I will also try to do research on strategies used in the past, so I can better evaluate their successfulness in my next task. This step will allow me to see different strategies that have been used to solve the problem of overcrowding in state prison systems. My research will primarily be determined by states that are comparable to Nebraska in size, region, and overcrowding, but also availability and access to strategic information.

### *3. Evaluate These Strategies*

I plan to evaluate these strategies based on the criteria of successfulness, cost, and timeliness to determine which strategy would be most effective and feasible for the Nebraska state prison system. Successfulness will be determined by which strategy has had the largest impact. Many of

Nebraska’s previous strategies have not had the desired outcome according to my research. Illinois, on the other hand, has had some success in reducing their state prison population by nearly 7,000 inmates (Brady-Lunny).

*4. Modify Strategy to Best Meet Nebraska Prison System’s Needs*

If needed, I will modify any strategy to best fit Nebraska’s needs. This may me paring down on costs to be feasible for Nebraska’s budget, or combining multiple strategies to have maximum impact. It may also mean considering strategies Nebraska has already tried and were not successful and avoiding strategies similar to those or alter those that are similar, so as not to repeat the same mistakes.

*5. Write Recommendation Report*

After conducting all of my research, I will then write a recommendation report that recommends a strategy or a combination of strategies that will combat the overcrowding problem in the Nebraska state prison system.

**Appendix A - Task Schedule**

Task 1									
Task 2									
Task 3									
Task 4									
Task 5									
	Oct 16th	Oct 23	Oct 30	Nov 6	Nov 13	Nov 20	Nov 27	Dec 4	Dec 13

**Appendix B - Peer Response #1**

Author:     Laura vana

Responder:     nicholas Dove    

1). After each paragraph, on the draft, write one sentence that summarizes the information that was presented and that tells the author what you got out of that paragraph.

2). Does the author follow the structural guidelines stipulated on the assignment sheet? Does the author have all required parts? If not, what is the author missing? How could the author better structure the proposal?

Yes, Laura does have all of the required parts. It is well organized and clearly shows the order of information.

3). How could the author more successfully demonstrate that the problem/issue needs to be solved or addressed in some way? How could the author better emphasize that the problem/issue actually exists and that the problem/issue is significant?

Laura could include info about how common prison overcrowding is in the United States as a whole. Or how many other states face these similar problems.

4). How could the author more efficaciously integrate research into the report, use research to demonstrate the necessity of addressing this problem/issue, and use research to demonstrate the significance of the problem/issue at hand? Where could the author include more research to make the report more persuasive?

Laura could add in data showing the economic costs of keeping these overcrowded prisons in Nebraska running. She could also use statistics about the estimated costs involving overcrowding ie, inmate deaths, medical treatment etc.

5). Is the author's research credible, recent, and pertinent? How could the author more effectively communicate the credibility of the research?

Laura's research is recent and pertinent the sources all seem credible and the issues they address are serious. I would suggest adding in slight detail as to how specifically these incidents can occur.

6). Does the author have a strong *ethos*? How does the author develop and strengthen her *ethos* and demonstrate her professionalism? How or in what ways can the author strengthen her *ethos* and more effectively display her professionalism?

Laura references several credible sources that discuss the problems with overcrowding in Nebraska prisons. It is further enhanced by her tackling the separate problems of overcrowding with evidence. She also mentions that she used to live in Nebraska thus giving her a bit more *ethos*, she obviously cares about her home state. She could strengthen her *ethos* by using statistics that compare Nebraska's prison's with other prison's. The comparison will give the reader a better idea of the relevance.

7). How could the author's research plan be articulated more clearly and precisely? Does the research plan seem doable, given the time restrictions that we have?

The research plan could be marked via lines that correlate to the date. This way the viewer definitively knows the date assigned. The research plan seems doable.

8). Does the research proposal persuade you that this issue/topic/problem is significant, that it needs to be addressed because of its significance; and that the author is capable of effectively researching the issue/topic/problem and delivering a recommendation report? How/why does the research proposal convince you?

It does convince me that it is important. It convinces me by it's use of several different sources and the mentioning of death, violence etc.

### **Appendix C - Peer Response #3**

Author: Lauren

Responder: Emily

1). After each paragraph, on the draft, write one sentence that summarizes the information that was presented and that tells the author what you got out of that paragraph.

I have numbered the paragraphs for convenience.

1. Requesting authorization to study overcrowding in Nebraska prison system
2. Establish what the problem is, preview its implications, and establish credibility
3. Overview the problem of overcrowding by citing specific percentages and mentioning failed efforts to reduce prison population
4. Mentioning previous research on topic, including instances of riots and deaths—establishing relevance of research
5. Overview of sources and research plan
6. Introduces proposed plan
7. Justifying research extent of overcrowding and how you will compare it to those in other states
8. Compare Nebraska prison system and overcrowding to those in other states
9. Evaluate other states' strategies—well specified w criteria
10. Making a conclusion for solving Nebraska prison overcrowding
11. Write recommendation report

2). Does the author follow the structural guidelines stipulated on the assignment sheet? Does the author have all required parts? If not, what is the author missing? How could the author better structure the proposal?

Yes—You are specific in each section of the proposal, leaving little unknown about your proposed research. If possible, further establish your ethos beyond the last sentence of the summary—why does this topic matter to you?

3). How could the author more successfully demonstrate that the problem/issue needs to be solved or addressed in some way? How could the author better emphasize that the problem/issue actually exists and that the problem/issue is significant?

This proposal is in great shape. I don't have many questions about the problem or issue because you use specific examples and emphasize the relevance.

4). How could the author more efficaciously integrate research into the report, use research to demonstrate the necessity of addressing this problem/issue, and use research to demonstrate the

significance of the problem/issue at hand? Where could the author include more research to make the report more persuasive?

If possible, more clearly cite your sources. I think you incorporate 4 of your sources, so bring in your additional sources wherever possible.

5). Is the author's research credible, recent, and pertinent? How could the author more effectively communicate the credibility of the research?

Each source sounds credible and relevant. I assume your remaining sources are recent. Don't forget to include your works cited.

6). Does the author have a strong *ethos*? How does the author develop and strengthen her *ethos* and demonstrate her professionalism? How or in what ways can the author strengthen her *ethos* and more effectively display her professionalism?

You are knowledgeable about the subject, as seen through your research. Again, if possible, expand on the *ethos* you mention in the summary.

7). How could the author's research plan be articulated more clearly and precisely? Does the research plan seem doable, given the time restrictions that we have?

Your research plan is specific, and I think you did a good job identifying criteria for evaluation. Given your plan, I think this is doable in the allotted time.

8). Does the research proposal persuade you that this issue/topic/problem is significant, that it needs to be addressed because of its significance; and that the author is capable of effectively researching the issue/topic/problem and delivering a recommendation report? How/why does the research proposal convince you?

Yes—I had not read about overcrowding before and your information clearly identifies its significance and implications. I think you're in great shape to create a recommendation report.

For the Author:

1). After perusing this PR sheet and the comments made on your draft, what revisions are going to make? Why are going to make these revisions? What specific suggestions from your responders are you going to incorporate and why? What suggestions are you going to ignore and why?

I added more sources and tried to make my citations clearer. I think this also added to my *ethos*, which was mentioned. I emphasized that I was from Nebraska to strengthen my *ethos* as well. I incorporated this because *ethos* is important to demonstrating that I am qualified to do this research.

2). How did this process make your proposal better? What did you learn from it?

I made sure I had enough sources.

3). How would you change this process for next time? What did you like and dislike? What did you think was most and least beneficial aspect? What would you rather do?

I think it is helpful to have someone new look over my paper. The least beneficial part was I found I received a lot of repetitive feedback.

### **Appendix C - Peer Response #3**

Author: Lauren Vana

Responder: Samantha DeRango

1). After each paragraph, on the draft, write one sentence that summarizes the information that was presented and that tells the author what you got out of that paragraph.

- 1) *Will be discussing the Nebraska prison system and its overcrowding*
- 2) *Prison overcrowding is bad for many reasons*
- 3) *Nebraska prisons are not designed to hold as many people as they are.*
- 4) *The overcrowding has a lot of negative downsides for prisoners and staff*
- 5) *Overcrowding increases violence and medical issues for staff and inmates*
- 6 and 7) *Outline of research proposal*
- 8) *You have already started and almost completed your first step.*
- 9) *Look at other states and compare*
- 10) *Evaluation*
- 11) *Modify the strategies*
- 12) *Prepare report*

2). Does the author follow the structural guidelines stipulated on the assignment sheet? Does the author have all required parts? If not, what is the author missing? How could the author better structure the proposal?

*Yes, you followed all the structural guidelines and have all the required parts. The entire proposal flowed smoothly and was very easy to follow.*

3). How could the author more successfully demonstrate that the problem/issue needs to be solved or addressed in some way? How could the author better emphasize that the problem/issue actually exists and that the problem/issue is significant?

*I think you do a really great job of showing the significance of the issue, especially when you put statistics and real life examples of violence or illness. I don't think there is very much you could add that would emphasize it more. Even though in some places it seems redundant, I would continue to include analysis after all of your research, just to continue emphasizing significance.*

4). How could the author more efficaciously integrate research into the report, use research to demonstrate the necessity of addressing this problem/issue, and use research to demonstrate the significance of the problem/issue at hand? Where could the author include more research to make the report more persuasive?



*You cite sources constantly throughout the proposal. Maybe find some stats from other states to compare to Nebraska, that way you can emphasize significance again and have some research to put in your proposed tasks.*

5). Is the author's research credible, recent, and pertinent? How could the author more effectively communicate the credibility of the research?

*Yes, all of your research are those things. I think if you continue to add research just made sure it is as up-to-date as these ones.*

6). Does the author have a strong *ethos*? How does the author develop and strengthen her *ethos* and demonstrate her professionalism? How or in what ways can the author strengthen her *ethos* and more effectively display her professionalism?

*You develop your ethos with the use of statistics and research, and also your personal interest. I liked your use of real life examples of violence in the jails to put some perspective on the issue and make it a little more personal.*

7). How could the author's research plan be articulated more clearly and precisely? Does the research plan seem doable, given the time restrictions that we have?

*I really like the simplicity of your research plan, and I thought your task schedule was unique but, again, easy to understand. It is definitely doable given the time restrictions.*

8). Does the research proposal persuade you that this issue/topic/problem is significant, that it needs to be addressed because of its significance; and that the author is capable of effectively researching the issue/topic/problem and delivering a recommendation report? How/why does the research proposal convince you?

*I am persuaded about the significance of this issue and your capability to research it. Your research was thorough and credible, and your interest in the subject is apparent.*

## **Appendix D - Works Cited**

Bogan, Jesse, and Kurt Erickson. "Missouri Faces Choice: Improve Prison System or Build Two New Lockups, Task Force Warns." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 4 Jan. 2018.

Brady-Lunny, Edith, and Ted Gest. "New Law Addresses Need to Reduce Illinois' Prison Numbers." *Herald and Review*, 28 Jan. 2018.

"Daily Statistics." *Iowa Department of Corrections*, State of Iowa, 30 Oct. 2018, doc.iowa.gov/daily-statistics.

Hammel, Paul. "Inspector General Says State Penitentiary's Problems Now Rival Tecumseh Prison." *Omaha World-Herald*, 11 Oct. 2018.

Hammel, Paul. "ACLU of Nebraska Files Lawsuit over Prison Overcrowding, Says Conditions Violate Inmates' Rights." *Omaha World-Herald*, 16 Aug. 2017.

- Huey, Meredith P., and Thomas L. McNulty. "Institutional Conditions and Prison Suicide: Conditional Effects of Deprivation and Overcrowding." *The Prison Journal*, vol. 85, no. 4, Dec. 2005, pp. 490–514., doi:10.1177/0032885505282258.
- Jackson-Greene, Bryant. "Illinois Leads Nation in Overcrowded Prisons." *Illinois Policy*, Illinois Policy Institute, 13 Oct. 2015, [www.illinoispolicy.org/illinois-leads-nation-in-overcrowded-prisons/](http://www.illinoispolicy.org/illinois-leads-nation-in-overcrowded-prisons/).
- Martin, Joseph L., et al. "'They Can Take Us Over Any Time They Want': Correctional Officer's Responses to Prison Crowding." *The Prison Journal*, vol. 92, no. 1, 2012, pp. 88–105.
- "NDCS Research Division." *NDCS*, Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, 2017, [corrections.nebraska.gov/public-information/ndcs-research-division](http://corrections.nebraska.gov/public-information/ndcs-research-division).
- Sabata v. Nebraska Department of Corrections. No. 4:17-cv--03107. United States District Court for the District of Nebraska. 16 August 2017.
- United States, Congress, Norwood, Joe, et al. "Annual Report Fiscal Year 2017." *Annual Report Fiscal Year 2017*, 2017.
- Williams, Tess. "Lawmakers Seek Solutions for Nebraska's Overcrowded Prisons." *Lincoln Journal Star*, 25 Mar. 2018.