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## Alumnus Named Jail Administrator of the Year

*Dr. Gary Christensen applies his dissertation research in anti-recidivism.*

Dr. Gary Christensen, a corrections administrator at the Dutchess County Jail in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., was chosen Jail Administrator of the Year by the American Jail Association in April. Christensen, who earned a Ph.D. in Psychology from Walden University in 2000, supervises more than 270 staff members and oversees a \$21 million annual budget.



*Dr. Gary Christensen*

The annual award highlights administrators who are exceptional in promoting programs that improve conditions, manage challenges of corrections leadership, promote staff training, and highlight the professional image of their facilities.

Christensen is especially noteworthy for his evidence-based practice and anti-recidivism research. "I first began researching evidence-based practice in corrections when I was working on my Walden dissertation," he says. "As part of that endeavor, I examined outcome-driven practice within corrections, which has been recognized for significant recidivism reduction and the enhancement of public safety. My doctoral degree readied me for the complex analyses and research necessary to realize such an approach."

Christensen ultimately designed and developed, (and now manages), the Dutchess County Jail Transition Program, which is offered within a 50-bed unit that operates as a "closed community" within the Dutchess County Jail.

The program was the first of its kind, Christensen says: "The transition program is unique in its approach to criminal recidivism, in New York state as well as nationwide. All aspects of the program are designed to develop a comprehensive transition plan for each offender. This individualized plan is formulated through a five-week joint effort among the offender, correctional officers and clinicians."

After three years, the program has realized about a 30 percent reduction in the rate of inmate recidivism, notes Christensen, who adds that it is widely regarded as a success by administrators and inmates alike.

"We have example after example of offenders who still come back to see us—of their own free will—due to the impact that we have had on their lives," Christensen says. "They return to talk with other offenders as well as to tell them how the program helped them. All in all, it is a rewarding experience for all involved."

To share the success of his program and enhance the implementation of evidence-based practice within other criminal justice systems, Christensen works with correctional leaders outside of Dutchess County. He has also published and presented papers on the topic, including at the 2006 jail re-entry roundtable hosted by the Urban Institute, a social policy research organization in Washington, D.C.

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