



An employee publication of the
Texas Department of Criminal Justice

January/February 2014
Volume 21 Issue 3

Features

Correctional officer training at TDCJ

On the training field, a line of recruits stands waiting in silence. A few weeks ago, these men and women were strangers; today they are a team, ready to meet the challenge of TDCJ's Correctional Officer Training Academy's practical tests.

Preparing new recruits for their first day on the job as a correctional officer (CO) is a difficult task. Even with military or law enforcement experience, new officers are likely to have many questions about their career duties in a state prison. For those who have never worked in a correctional environment, TDCJ's Correctional Officer Training Academy is the first step toward becoming a criminal justice professional.



Training Sergeant Charles Battles, center, teaches cadets the proper way to apply and remove restraints.

Marine Corps veteran Danielle Muniz began the academy in September and, while admitting to some initial stress, found that listen-

ing to and following the guidance of her instructors was fundamental to her success on the job, saying, "I was a little nervous going into this line of work, but I was really happy with the amount of experience the instructors had. They really prepared me for my unit assignment."

Region VI Training Sergeant Chris Andrews helps mold recruits into qualified TDCJ correctional officers, and understands the critical importance of sending properly prepared COs to work on the front lines of prison security. Commenting on the training academies' mission, Andrews notes, "The more tools we give them, the more confidently they can do their job. We know that a fully trained staff creates a safer working environment and safer communities."

All newly hired correctional officers are required to attend pre-service training at one of six Correctional Institutions Division (CID) regional training academies or unit-based academies found throughout the state. Trainees attend the academy for five and a half weeks, receiving 200 hours of core cur-

riculum instruction. New officers are introduced to criminal justice topics such as ethics and professionalism, offender disciplinary procedure, mental health issues and active listening techniques. In addition, every correctional officer candidate must pass the Physical Agility Test (PAT), which consists of sit-ups, pushups, a walk/run and additional exercises.



Pre-service training cadets practice defensive tactics under the instruction of Training Sergeant Obadiah Lopez, right.

Upon graduation from the Training Academy, officers are assigned to a unit where they complete an additional 104 hours of on-the-job training (OJT) while working around incarcerated offenders in a secure prison environment. Designed to build upon the acad-

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

emy curriculum, OJT strengthens officer's skills by pairing them with a Field Training Officer who acts as a mentor and gives them more practical, hands-on experience. Once hired, correctional officers return for 40 hours of annual in-service training.



Correctional officers participate in firearm proficiency training exercises on the firing range.

In fiscal year (FY) 2013, 5,598 correctional officers attended pre-service training. These academy graduates went on to support a workforce of nearly 30,000 correctional staff across the state. In FY 2013, 28,443 uniformed and non-uniformed security staff completed in-service academy training.

To help ensure the CO training program stays relevant and effective, CID continually reviews and evaluates the academy's educational curriculum, and modifications are made in response to policy changes and needs assessments. Practical application tests were added in order to measure trainees' competency in five specific areas: defensive tactics, chemical agent deployment, restraint and escort procedures, firearm

proficiency and physical agility. This training model was designed to emulate the training style of law enforcement academies and the armed forces.

Now a correctional officer at the Crain Unit with two months experience, Muniz appreciates her academy training, noting that "Everything I've seen so far in my job is on point with what we were taught. I think going through the Academy and having three weeks of OJT is a great system. It truly prepared me for the experience."

Another recent innovation to the pre-service and in-service training curriculum includes the addition of a Regional Director's Discretionary Block designed to give staff an opportunity to discuss operational and security issues which are best dealt with at a regional



In-service cadets spend hours in the Academy classroom receiving core curriculum instruction.

level. The Discretionary Block allows even the newest staff members to directly address CID managers. Sgt. Andrews explains, "In such a large agency, with so many employees, staff can feel insignificant. Meeting re-

gional staff gives them the confidence that this is a team effort and that each employee matters. It gives them the opportunity to be heard. If you're doing the same thing day-in, day-out and you don't feel like anyone is listening to the concerns you have, it makes the employee disgruntled. But if they feel their voice is being heard, it brings up morale."

TDCJ correctional officers are among the finest criminal justice security staff in the state and the agency works hard to equip them with the professional knowledge and practical skills they need to do their job. CO training techniques require regular updating to keep pace with new developments in prison management. Correctional Training Director Lorie Davis outlines the agency's plan for maintaining a modern and effective training program, saying "The agency will continue to anticipate change and adopt new concepts to improve management and operation of the CO training program. We are dedicated to ensuring our academy graduates are capable of effectively and safely operating within the prison environment." ●