DIRECTIONS: Choose Option One or Option Two. Save two electronic copies of your answer (one with just your ID number assigned to you, the other with your ID number and name). Email both copies to dv14@txstate.edu. Print out a hard copy as well with both your id number and name written on it.

OPTION 1

In June 2012 Grant Duwe (Director of Research and Evaluation for the Minnesota Department of Corrections) published an evaluation of the Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan (MCORP)\(^1\). The abstract of this article follows.

Using a randomized experimental design, this study evaluated the effectiveness of the Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan (MCORP), an offender reentry pilot project implemented in 2008. In an effort to reduce recidivism, MCORP attempted to increase offender access to community services and programming by producing greater case management collaboration between caseworkers in prison and supervision agents in the community. The results showed that MCORP significantly improved employment rates, decreased homelessness, broadened offenders’ systems of social support, and increased the extent to which offenders participated in community support programming (mentoring, restorative justice services, and faith-based programming). The findings further revealed that MCORP significantly reduced all three types of reoffending (rearrest, reconviction, and new offense reincarcerations) but did not have a significant impact on supervision revocations for technical violations. The evidence suggests that MCORP was effective in decreasing reoffending largely because it increased the extent to which offenders were employed, involved in community support programming, and able to develop systems of social support.

Prior to their release from prison, eligible offenders were randomly assigned to either the treatment group (i.e., they participated in MCORP) or the control group (i.e., they received “business as usual” services in both the institution and the community) from January to September 2008. Offenders from the MCORP and control groups were released from state prison facilities to communities in the five pilot counties from February to December 2008. In assessing the effectiveness of MCORP, this study attempts to address three main questions. First, did MCORP increase offender access to community services and programming? Second, did MCORP reduce recidivism? Third, in an effort to identify the reasons why MCORP was effective or not, what impact did specific types of community programming and services have on

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recidivism? To answer these questions, data were collected that included information on what happened with offenders prior to their admission to prison, during their imprisonment, and during the first six months following their release from prison. Recidivism data were collected through the end of October 2009, resulting in an average follow-up period of 16 months.

The sample of research subjects were chosen from a limited number of prison facilities, as opposed to from the entire system. In order to avoid a potential reactivity problem the researcher did not inform the research subjects (i.e., inmates) of their participation in the experiment. Neither did he inform the institutional and parole staffs of the inmate’s participation as a research subject. A critical component of the MCORP program is the coordination between institutional and parole staffs. In many states these two functions are separated and in some situations these staffs are prohibited from sharing information. The researcher, by virtue of his administrative position in the department, was able to, and did, collect detailed, personal and identifying information about each inmate participating in the study.

Respond to the following questions.

1. What were the researcher’s null and alternative hypotheses?
2. Based on the information available, what independent variable(s) and dependent variable(s) would be relevant to this study?
3. Describe the researcher’s research design and discuss its appropriateness and or inappropriateness for this particular study?
4. What are three potential threats to validity (internal and external) in this study and how would you address them if you were the researcher?
5. Critique the researcher’s sampling strategy and its potential impact on the study’s external validity?
6. Given this particular population, what are the potential ethical problems associated with this study, focusing on the protection of human subjects and privacy issues?
San Antonio is experiencing an increase of purse snatching in its downtown area. The problem appears to be localized within two specific parts of the downtown area. In response to this crime pattern the police department wants to implement foot patrol strategy in one of the targeted areas. This strategy will require officers to walk downtown beats and be generally visible in an effort to deter would be purse snatchers. The cost (in overtime salary) of this program is prohibitive so the City Manager wants to know if the program will be effective at reducing purse snatching. So, they have hired you as a consultant to conduct a study to determine whether this policing strategy will reduce purse snatchings.

Design a study to assess the effectiveness of the foot patrol strategy for reducing purse snatching. This design must include:

1. At least two hypotheses with a discussion of how theory can be applied to develop these hypotheses.
2. Identification of the independent and dependent variable(s). Include an operational definition of your dependent variable.
3. A discussion of the research design implemented to study the solution to the problem.
4. Identify what type of analysis will be conducted for the study.
5. Discuss at least three plausible threats to validity (internal and external) and how those can be minimized.
6. Identify at least two ethical issues that are potentially problematic and what safeguards will be implemented.