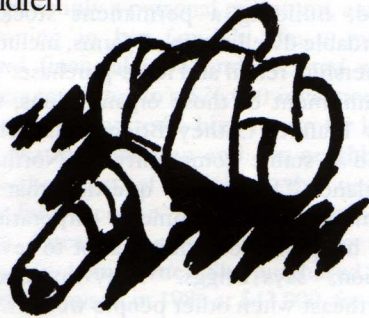


How Do We Determine Success?

by Craig Mosbaek,
Forum Editor

“Commit the crime, do the time.” Once a criminal is caught and tried, what happens next? The state has thousands of men, women, and children



incarcerated or under supervision. How are they changed by their encounter with Oregon's criminal justice system?

On a case-by-case basis, some questions are easy to answer. With a name or a case number, you can go to the county courthouse and find a convict's offense and sentence. On any given day, an officer in the Department of Corrections knows whether an offender is in prison or out.

Information on the whole system is harder to access. What percentage of burglaries are reported to police? How many offenders plea-bargain to a lesser offense? What is the average length of time a drunk driver spends in jail? What are the recidivism rates of offenders who completed various treatment programs?

Answers to these questions are not available on a routine basis. Although data systems and agency reports are being improved, lack of answers has hampered informed debate on criminal justice policy.

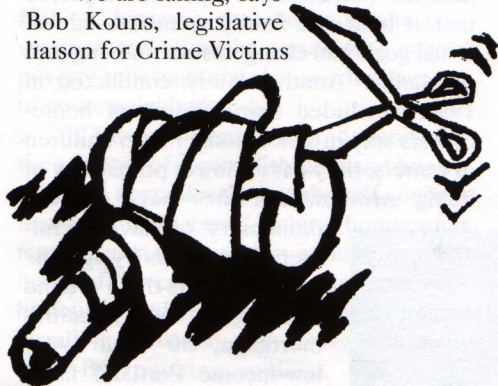
To grade our criminal justice system, we have to agree on the purposes of the system. However, the criminal justice system is disjointed, involving many different people and agencies. Even within agencies, officials have different ideas as to what their mission is. Should police agencies focus on catching criminals or preventing crime? Should judges hand

down sentences proportional to the harm of the crime, or sentences likely to reduce the chances that an offender will commit another crime?

Most people agree, however, that a parolee should be encouraged not to commit another crime. So, what does reduce recidivism? Judges could experiment by randomly assigning offenders to prison, probation, or a treatment program. While a true scientific design is not possible, common sense dictates that we should at least look at differences in recidivism rates. Yet policymakers don't demand this information, even as they dedicate more of local and state budgets to public safety.

In this issue:

We are failing, says Bob Kouns, legislative liaison for Crime Victims



United, because we do not know what works. Those who hand out sentences, Circuit Court Judge Michael Marcus argues, should be given information about how similar offenders have done under different sentences.

In 1989 Oregon introduced new felony sentencing guidelines. Kathleen Bogan describes their history. She maintains that citizens, who are often the decision makers on sentencing policies, need a better grasp of criminal justice issues.

In 1994 the electorate passed Measure 11, which instituted mandatory minimum sentences for violent crimes, including offenders 15 years and older. The fairness

and impact of Measure 11 are debated by Kevin Mannix, one of its sponsors, and Michael Kelly, a proponent of its repeal.

Dennis Maloney describes how they re-evaluated the way they respond to crime in Deschutes County, focusing particularly on the impact on victims. Government agencies and citizens have become involved, leading to what they consider to be a more effective criminal justice system.

Domestic violence is a severe problem, according to Pauline Anderson, who summarizes a study done by the City Club of Portland. She describes the solutions that work yet need more support from the public and policy-makers.

Must we wage war on crime? Charles Rogers argues that waging war does not work. Instead, we may lose our civil rights in the name of "effective" crime control.

While this forum is not the final word on criminal justice reform, we hope that we have raised the issues that will help lead to answers and solutions.

Craig Mosbaek, a former research manager with the Oregon Criminal Justice Council, spent 10 years doing research and evaluation in the criminal justice field. He is currently a research analyst with the Oregon Health Division.

