**Brief Summary**

**The Scope and Purpose of American Corrections**

In the final stage of the criminal justice system, correctional agencies must carry out the sentences imposed by the courts.  From humble beginnings, corrections in the United States has become a booming industry employing hundreds of thousands of personnel to supervise over 7 million people, including prison and jail inmates and persons on probation and parole. Correctional populations have increased over time, although it is difficult to identify a single cause for the increase.  At the same time, correctional practice has shifted focus from rehabilitation to incapacitation, and the United States currently has the world's highest incarceration rate.  Each correctional agency maintains its own philosophy, making it very difficult to identify a consistent purpose of corrections throughout the states.

**Four Essential Tensions Underlying Correctional Philosophy and Policy**

The conflict between what should be and what actually becomes correctional policy stems from four essential tensions. Finances most profoundly influence correctional policy; but tensions related to research, discretion, and invisibility also influence how the system works and what it is able to achieve.

**History and Practice of Institutional Corrections**

The type of corrections system in place is often determined by the current beliefs about how best to deal with criminals under the constraints of the tensions previously mentioned. Correctional institutions have evolved from solitary rehabilitation centers to less expensive congregate systems, with variations based on physical organization and security levels. Regardless of the institution, incarceration consists of total control and of deprivations that shape both the prison atmosphere and the inmates who live within it.

**History and Practice of Community Corrections**

As an alternative to incarceration, community corrections have grown in popularity to combat soaring prison populations and costs. In early times, mark systems that allowed early release provided prisoners with an incentive to follow institutional rules and to pursue rehabilitative activities.  The original goal of parole was to rehabilitate offenders; with the development of truth-in-sentencing policies, however, the use of parole has greatly diminished.  Probation was developed to allow less serious offenders to serve their sentence in the community and has become the most popular sentence in the United States today.  As dissatisfaction with the current correctional system and lack of correctional funding continue, there has been growth in the use of alternative intermediate sanctions.