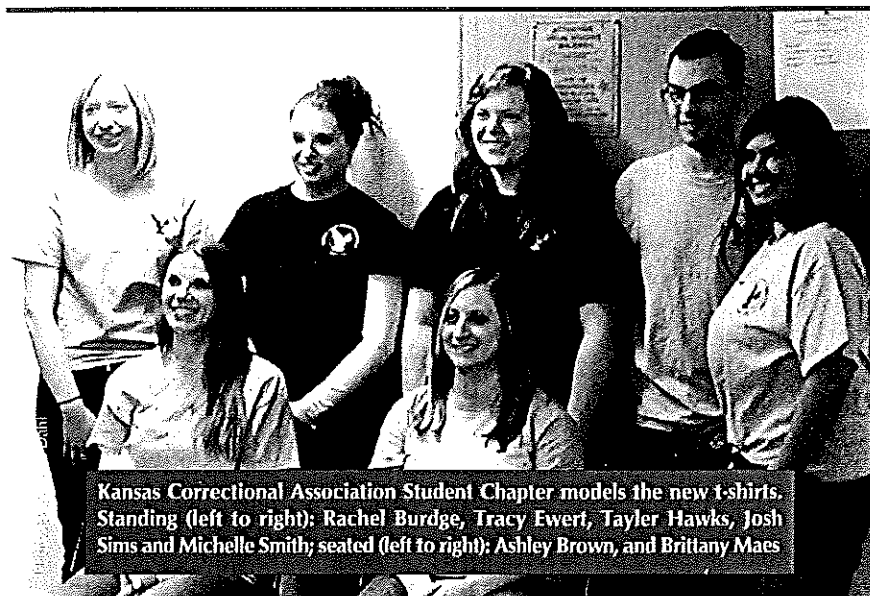


# C R E A

## an ACA Student Chapter

By Patricia Dahl and Ashley Brown



Kansas Correctional Association Student Chapter models the new t-shirts. Standing (left to right): Rachel Burdge, Tracy Ewert, Taylor Hawks, Josh Sims and Michelle Smith; seated (left to right): Ashley Brown, and Brittany Maes

iates representing the corrections profession to “provide their unique professional and regional insights in the field of corrections” and to share knowledge and expertise from which thousands of members can benefit.<sup>1</sup> Some state affiliates collaborate with ACA and allow state affiliate members to hold simultaneous, dual membership with ACA. Kansas is a dual membership state.

Another organizational arm to both ACA and the state affiliates are the student chapters, which can connect both ACA and the state affiliate to local colleges and universities that may sponsor the student chapter. Colleges offering a social science degree program, particularly a criminal justice curriculum, will often have interest-based student groups or clubs on campus. If there is a strong enough interest in corrections as a profession or a field of study, it can provide the ideal soil for growing an ACA student chapter.

**T**he 2014 academic year at Washburn University in eastern Kansas began with the state secretary of corrections coming to speak to criminal justice students. The following month, 30 students toured a state prison located more than an hour away from campus. Looking back at the past two years, it is easier now to see the steps that were taken, the challenges that were faced and the small successes that were celebrated when starting an American Correctional Association student chapter.

### What is a Student Chapter?

In September 2012, Washburn University became the first academic institution in Kansas to create a student chapter for ACA and its state affiliate, the Kansas Correctional Association. ACA is the oldest and largest community of individuals who are committed to the field of corrections. As ACA notes on its website, it relies on state-level affil-

### Getting Started

The idea of starting a student chapter began while attending the ACA 142nd Congress of Correction in Denver and discovering, by accident, the existence of student organizations with a particular focus on the field of corrections. It did not take long to recognize the inherent value in having a program on campus that could unite higher education and criminal justice students with correctional organizations and practitioners. Representatives of student chapters in other states often meet annually at ACA conferences. These conferences provide an opportunity for attendees to mingle with state affiliate representatives and student affairs committee members who are eager to share information about the workings of an ACA student chapter. In the process of talking with one particular representative, it was discovered Kansas did not have an ACA student chapter. That was the impetus needed to return home and explore the process of creating a student chapter for Kansas.

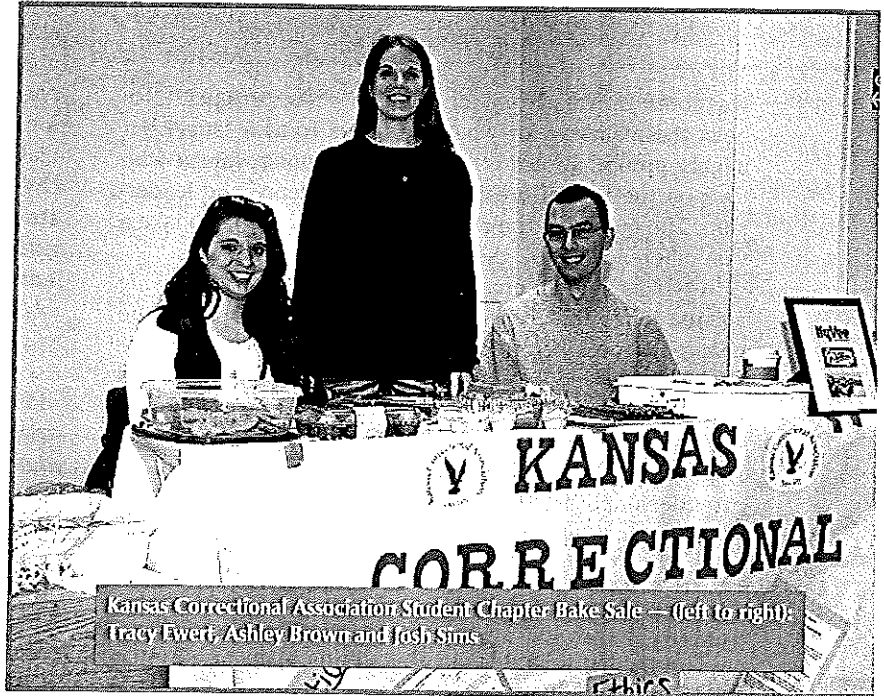
# I N G

The Washburn University Criminal Justice Department Chairperson Gary Bayens, Ph.D., was approached with the idea for the student chapter. As a former director of a detention center, he had a strong background in corrections; he was familiar with the state affiliate organization and its executive board members; and he was an enthusiastic supporter of having the university host Kansas' first ACA student chapter. It also helped to reach out to current student groups on campus for advice on the best way to establish a student organization approved by the campus administration. Discussions with the assistant dean for the School of Applied Studies, the Student Services Office and the Student Government Association provided enough navigation to move the student chapter forward.

## Chapter Structure

To be considered an official student club or organization, most colleges require the organization to first be approved by certain administrative entities on campus. This recognition is important for following guidelines and receiving funding for on-campus and off-campus activities. Each ACA student chapter must be sponsored by a faculty advisor, who helps oversee the goals and, to some extent, the workings of the chapter. As Evans, Evans and Sherman note, "the faculty advisor is part friend, part mentor, part parent and part boss."<sup>2</sup>

The structure of the typical student chapter allows for a chapter president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and historian. If the chapter is large enough, it can utilize a variety of small committees (and the roles of committee chairs) for various duties, such as fundraising or special projects. The ACA student chapter at Washburn University has remained fairly small, with the majority of the responsibilities falling under a president, secretary and treasurer. Additional officer positions may become available as membership size and goals dictate. Once a foundation of members was established, the recommended ACA student chapter constitution was adopted; bylaws were written; a mission statement was created; and visionary goals were established.



## Chapter Meetings

Finding the best time to hold monthly meetings can be a challenge, since students have many conflicting academic and personal schedules. It is also necessary to be cognitive of meeting times that might conflict with other campus events affecting students. The student chapter members took a poll and determined that early evenings — after most daytime classes had ended and before evening classes had begun — worked best. The students established a location that could accommodate regular chapter meetings and began the task of advertising and promoting the student chapter meetings through a variety of outlets including posted flyers, announcements in the campus newspaper and the creation of a student chapter Facebook page.

The first informational meeting consisted of six criminal justice students. The group also included a graduate student in social work, who worked at a military detention facility and had a professional interest in corrections, as well as a psychology major, who was interested in working with clientele in jails and prisons. Ashley Brown, the



The Student Chapter members at the Student Organization Achievement Recognition Award Ceremony — (left to right): Rachel Burdge, Ashley Brown, Brittany Maes and Tracy Ewert

Washburn University student chapter's first president, has been the mainstay for what she refers to as a "small but mighty group." Brown is an organized young woman who took on the role of president with confidence and leadership. The quality of the student chapter leader can make a vast difference in how the group functions and thrives.

A typical student chapter meeting consists of reviewing agenda items that were compiled and distributed to the chapter officers before each meeting. The discussions are usually lively and lighthearted as the chapter officers and members plan for the completion of goals and prepare for upcoming events. Some refreshments are provided at each meeting, such as cookies and lemonade, to help attract attendees and set the atmosphere for a productive, yet pleasant meeting.

## Chapter Membership

The student chapter membership is open to all interested undergraduate or graduate students who have an interest in corrections as a profession or as a field of study. In order to qualify as an ACA student chapter, a baseline of 10 student members must be established and maintained. It helps tremendously to have an ACA state affiliate whose executive board is willing to sponsor a limited number of student memberships to help establish the chapter base while the chapter works to attract more members. Recruiting seems to be a common challenge for on-campus groups since students are already encumbered with courses, employment and social activities. The key membership benefits for many student chapters are networking opportunities, recognition (individually or as a group), professional development, attending different kinds of events and the opportunities for leadership experience.

While it may seem that the benefits of a student chapter, such as leadership, socializing and educational opportunities, might be enough to attract new members on a regular basis, it often requires effort and persistence to find the students who are willing to carve out additional time for a reasonable level of participation in a student chapter. Also, the benefits of the student chapter have to be balanced with the demands that the chapter can unintentionally put

on students' time. Yet, students often have a great deal of energy and passion that, when harnessed, can provide the momentum for positive action. Finding creative ways to meet the recruitment challenges is worth the continuing effort. One of the incentives that was tested and met with some success was a first-year sponsored membership in exchange for a level of commitment for participation in meetings, fundraisers and service work. Some other strategies can include asking members to bring a friend to a meeting, raffling one or two free memberships during a campus event and asking faculty to give extra credit for either participation or membership in the chapter.

## Fundraising

For events and activities, there are a variety of ways that chapters can raise funds. It helps abundantly if the state affiliate organization is supportive of the student chapter and has the resources and readiness to help sponsor a few chapter activities, such as members attending a local correctional training or a conference. It is also beneficial if campus administrators and department faculty know the value of the student chapter and offer their support through time and resources.

Nevertheless, student chapter fundraisers are still the most common source for funding chapter activities. One of the first fundraisers undertaken by the Kansas student chapter was a simple bake sale. It was a way for students to "test the waters" of fundraising. Local bakeries and doughnut shops provided free baked goods in exchange for advertising their businesses, and some faculty and students also volunteered their homemade baked items. While the fundraiser was relatively easy to implement, the money that it generated was minimal (a little more than \$200), and a portion of that amount came from a single, charitable donor. Nevertheless, it was a start that allowed the students to experience chapter fundraising for the first time. The bake sale has now become an annual spring event on campus and is one of several avenues for connecting with the local community as well as getting the chapter name "out there."

Selling state affiliate and student chapter T-shirts has also been a fun and reasonably successful enterprise. The student chapter sponsored a T-shirt design contest. Chapter members submitted their creations and voted on a chapter logo, as well as a catchy slogan that could appeal to a wide range of individuals. While there is an upfront cost to purchasing the T-shirts, they are items that can then be sold to chapter members and can generate donations (a suggested price) from faculty, students-at-large and even the general public when the T-shirts are displayed at student chapter events.

## Chapter Activities

Leadership is one of the greatest challenges for corrections in the 21st century.<sup>3</sup> Student chapter activities provide many opportunities for members to develop a range of leadership qualities and skills. Students practice the roles of manager, fundraiser, designer, volunteer and mentor. During its first year, the chapter members donated

considerable service hours to help the community and the campus. Chapter members joined forces with nursing students and participated in a health fair at a women's prison by providing information on reentry strategies. The members donated hours moving new students into their dorms and welcoming them to the campus. Members also assisted the state affiliate with its fundraiser by providing all-day security at a local racing event, and members collected donations from campus staff for a child advocacy center. The chapter has been nominated for a student organization university award each year since it began.

In addition, it was decided early on that one of the best ways for the student chapter to promote corrections as both a profession and field of study was to invite monthly guest speakers to provide a brief presentation based on their practitioner knowledge and experience. The chapter officers contact local corrections professionals and arrange the logistics for these events. Although the turnout for some of the presentations is hard to predict, the number of attendees has been growing, along with the chapter's presence on campus as it advertises the events campuswide each month.

Since its inception, one of the most popular activities has been the chapter-sponsored correctional facility tours. The tours usually involve about 20 students, who either carpool from campus or drive to meet at the facilities that are often located an hour or more from campus. Since space is usually limited on these tours, one of the benefits of being a student chapter member is that it guarantees a spot on the tour list. The tours provide members with an opportunity to connect with a variety of corrections professionals, and, in turn, those professionals gain an appreciation for criminal justice students as potential interns and employees.

## Recommendations

The experience of starting and growing an ACA student chapter is exciting, demanding and gratifying. The following are a few recommendations for starting an ACA student chapter:

- Gain support from the state affiliate, the campus institution and the faculty;
- Enlist an enthusiastic and active faculty advisor;
- Build a strong team, starting with the chapter president and other officers;
- Find motivated students and discover ways to spark motivation in more students;
- Meet on a regular basis with informal, fun and productive monthly meetings;
- Provide a variety of activities for members to experience and enjoy;
- Explore both traditional and creative ways to fundraise; and
- Build and market the student chapter brand through a variety of avenues.

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## Conclusion

An ACA student chapter can offer students an opportunity to network, gain professional development, practice leadership roles and build relationships with people and organizations. It can be an exciting platform for bringing together students in higher education, practitioners in corrections, policymakers from state affiliates and administrators from ACA. The Kansas ACA student chapter believes there is no better way to help attract and mentor future corrections professionals and to promote the field and study of corrections.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> American Correctional Association. 2014. *Chapters and affiliates*. Retrieved from [http://www.aca.org/ACA\\_Prod\\_IMIS/ACA\\_Member/Membership/Chapters\\_\\_Affiliates/ACA\\_Member/Membership/Chapters\\_Affiliates\\_Home.aspx?hkey=2910ae77-207b-4b2e-839e-74ef05e47d80](http://www.aca.org/ACA_Prod_IMIS/ACA_Member/Membership/Chapters__Affiliates/ACA_Member/Membership/Chapters_Affiliates_Home.aspx?hkey=2910ae77-207b-4b2e-839e-74ef05e47d80).

<sup>2</sup> Evans, M.D., D.M. Evans and L.D. Sherman. 2001. Seven keys to a successful ASCE student chapter or club: Guide for student leaders and faculty advisors. *Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering Education and Practice*, 127(2):65-74.

<sup>3</sup> Carlson, P.M. 2015. *Prison and jail administration: Practice and theory, third edition*. Burlington, Mass.: Jones and Bartlett Learning.



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