

the LETTER

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The Corrections Initiative

Many issues of THE LETTER have reported on relatively recent projects, including the Monterey Project and the Education Initiative. Because of the importance of these projects, and others, we expect to update these efforts in subsequent issues, as additional data become available. This issue, however, reports on an important ongoing project of TPI, The Corrections Initiative. Your editors believe that there is no more urgent and appropriate initiative for The Pacific Institute to address than the enormous problems associated with our penal system.

It can be argued that the word “penal” itself denotes punishment and pain, derived from the Latin word *poenalis*, meaning punishment and, at the very least, implying pain. Contrast this method of changing behavior with The Pacific Institute’s emphasis on building efficacy. The Institute’s early work, performed in the late 1980s and early 1990s in California under the direction of Daryl Conrad and Gordy Graham, was quite successful in building efficacy. This was reflected by improvement in the ability of former inmates to get jobs when released, and to avoid returning to prison. This work in California, plus our efforts in

England and South Africa, will be reported in the next issue of THE LETTER. This issue is devoted entirely to background information on the development of corrections and penal policy over the past twenty-five years, with emphasis on the current and future influence of the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE) conducted in 1971. Since the role of social-cognitive psychology in addressing the problems of prisons was established in large measure as a result of SPE, we focus first on this astonishing ground-breaking study.

Stanford Prison Experiment

Since the early 1970s, the management of our correction institutions has changed dramatically. A major factor in this change was a remarkable study performed by Haney, C., Banks, W., & Zimbardo, P. (1973). *Interpersonal dynamics in a simulated prison*. *International Journal of Criminology and Penology*, 1, pp. 69-97. Twenty-five years later, Henry, C., & Zimbardo, P., published an analysis of the effects of the earlier study cited above, in Henry, C., & Zimbardo, P., *The Past and Future of U.S. Prison Policy*, *American Psychology* 1998, Volume 53, Number 7, pp. 709-724.

The SPE was, in reality, a seven day simulated prison experience for a group of mentally and emotionally healthy student “prisoners” and “guards” who were assigned their roles as a condition of the study. At the time of the study, the social-cognitive revolution was occurring, and the influence of social, institutional and situational settings on cognitive and emotional behavior was given much attention by psychologists. Essentially, the SPE was a test of the effect of the social, and what the authors of the study termed the “situations” of the prison environment on the behavior of the prisoners.

Much to the surprise of the authors and the general public, the mock prisoners “suffered acute psychological trauma and breakdowns. Some of the students begged to be released from the intense pains of less than a week of merely simulated imprisonment, whereas others adapted by becoming obedient to the unjust authority of the guards. The guards, too – who also had been carefully chosen on the basis of their normal-average scores on a variety of personality measures – quickly internalized their randomly assigned roles, soon began mistreating their peers and were



A Message from Lou & Diane:

This issue of THE LETTER is the first of two which concern the importance we attach to the work we have done, and are doing still, with corrections personnel – including administrators, guards and inmates.

The current issue focuses on the past 25 years, including the impact of one of the most psychologically revealing studies ever conducted on a “prison environment.” The quotes are attached to the term “prison environment,” simply because it was a demonstration experiment, in a simulated prison setting, consisting of mentally and physically stable students from Stanford University, a factor that, the reader will understand, adds credence to the study.

*Entitled the **Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE)**, this landmark study stressed the negative social and cognitive features of the prison environment which contribute to the low success rate in the rehabilitation of inmates. This was measured by their adjustment to the world outside the prison, in terms of such variables as securing and retaining a job, and the recidivism rate.*

The Pacific Institute’s work with correctional institutions has been shown to be very helpful in improving self-efficacy, based on social-cognitive theory. These successes will be the emphasis of the next issue of THE LETTER, along with an introduction to data from the so-called “nun’s study,” showing, among other interesting findings, that happiness and well-being contribute to longevity.

Lou & Diane Tice

Lou Tice
THE
PACIFIC
INSTITUTE®



1709 HARBOR AVENUE SW • SEATTLE, WA 98126-2049
Phone: (800) 426-3660 • Fax: (206) 587-6007
www.loutice.com

Dr. Glenn Terrell, Editor, gterrell@pac-inst.com
Christy A. Watson, Associate Editor, cwatson@pac-inst.com



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indifferent to the obvious suffering that their actions produced. Several of them devised sadistically inventive ways to harass and degrade the prisoners . . . and none of the less-actively cruel mock-guards ever intervened or complained about the abuses they witnessed. Our planned two-week experiment had to be aborted after only six days because the experience dramatically and painfully transformed most of the participants in ways we did not anticipate, prepare for, or predict.”

Haney and Zimbardo, with some justification, assert that SPE was an “experimental demonstration of the extraordinary power of institutional environments to influence those who passed through them.” And changing environments through the application of cognitive skills in our work with both inmates and prison administrators is The Institute’s role.

The Stanford Prison Experiment generated reform efforts in the 1970s and 80s, directed toward changing prison environments by replacing the social and physical conditions that generated negative behaviors with those designed to make the prison experience a preparation for re-entry to the outside world. Despite the best efforts of correctional leaders, the life of prisoners seems not to have changed much. Your editors believe that the main stumbling block is the general public opinion that prisons are punishment for the inmates and therefore are designed and managed to cause pain.

The number of prisoners in the United States increased dramatically during the last twenty-five years. (See Figure 1, next page.) From 1970 to 1995, the number increased from 200,000 to

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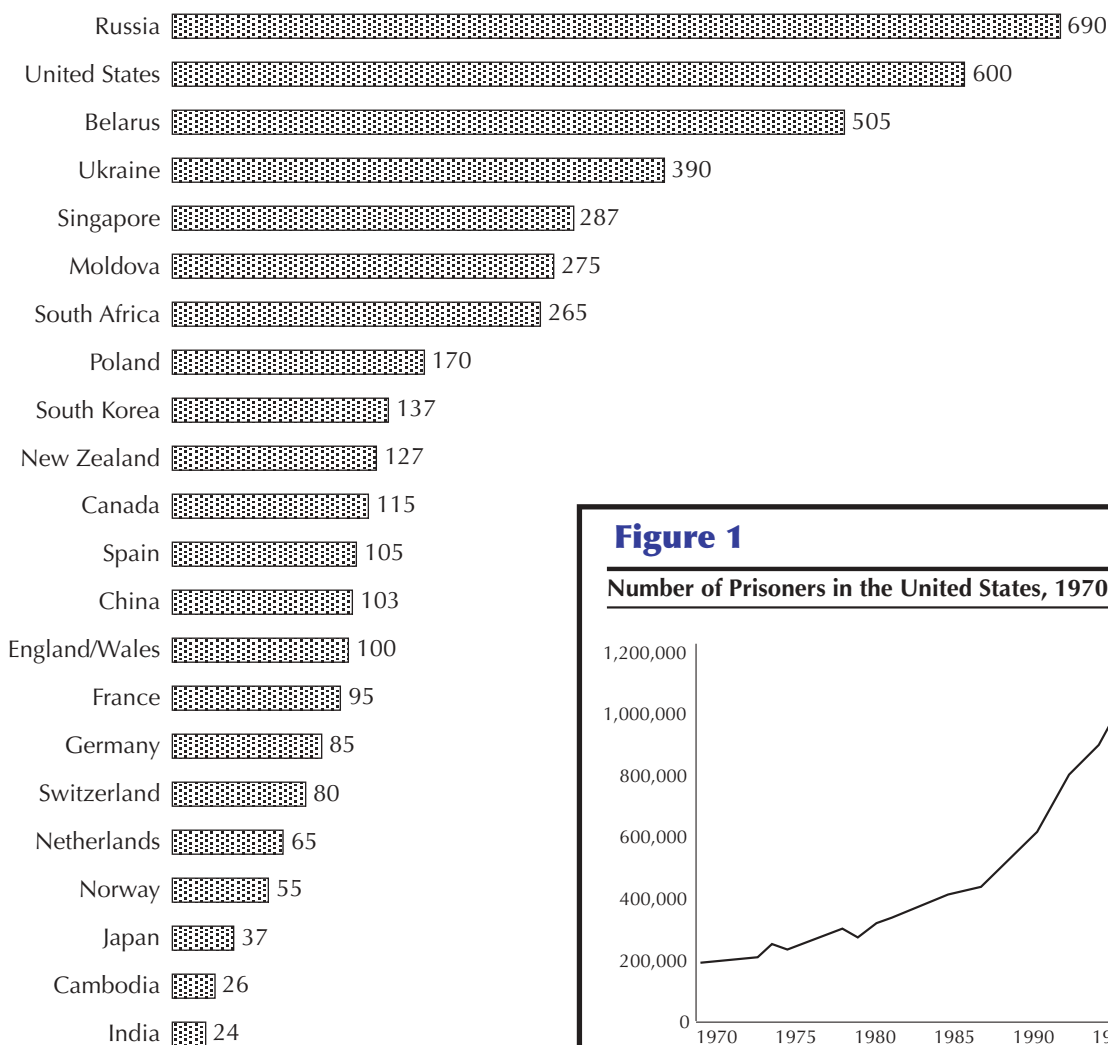
1,700,000, necessitating the construction of many new prisons. The increase in number was augmented by the politically popular stance of legislative and judicial officers for longer sentences. (Maurer, M. (1992), *Americans Behind Bars: A Comparison of International Rates of Incarceration*. In Churchill, W. & Vanderwall, J. J. (Eds.), *Cages of Steel: The Politics of Imprisonment in the United States* (pp. 22-37). Washington, DC: Maisonneuve Press.) In the early 1990s, the United States had more

incarcerated than any industrialized nation. (See Figure 2 below.) Perhaps even more startling is the rate of incarceration per 100,000 population as of 1995, also revealed by Figure 2. (From *Americans Behind Bars: U.S. and International Use of Incarceration*, 1995, by Maurer, M., 1997, Washington D.C. *The Sentencing Project*, copyright 1997 by the Sentencing Project. Only Russia had a rate greater than the U.S. (It is your editor's understanding that the U.S. rate is now greater than Russia's.)

Changes in the Distribution of Offenses---1985-95, State and Federal Prisons

Figure 3 on the next page reveals the changes in classification of prisoners in terms of types of offenses. The most dramatic change revealed by the data in Figure 3 is the sharp increase in incarceration for drug offenses. Haney and Zimbardo, on whom we rely for much of this issue of THE LETTER, state the following regarding the dramatic increase in the numbers incarcerated. "...The extraordinary increase in the numbers of persons

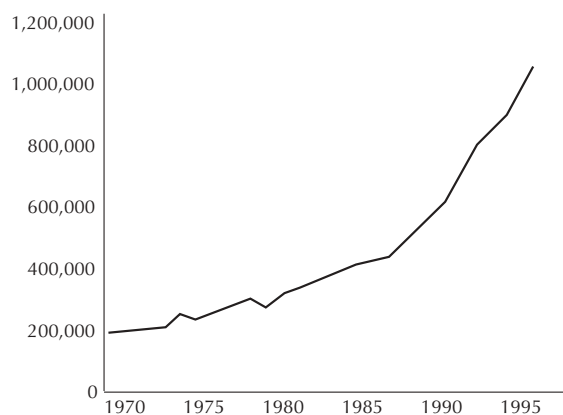
Figure 2 Incarceration Rates for Selected Nations, 1995



Rate of Incarceration per 100,000 Population

Figure 1

Number of Prisoners in the United States, 1970-1995



Note: Jail inmates are not included.

in prison, the disproportionate incarceration of minorities, and the high percentage of persons incarcerated for drug offenses...reflect a consistent disregard of context and situation in the criminal justice policies of the past 25 years. The unprecedented use of imprisonment, per se, manifests a policy choice to incarcerate individual lawbreakers instead of targeting the criminologic social conditions and risk factors that have contributed to their criminality.” Again, we mention The Pacific Institute’s successful record of assisting prison

inmates and administrators in their effort to understand what Haney and Zimbardo mean by “context and situation,” by helping them to understand how to use cognitive skills to accomplish these goals.

Disparity of Racial Composition of Prison Populations

One of the most vexatious problems of our criminal justice system is the flagrantly disproportionate numbers of racial minorities who are incarcerated in our prison system, particularly black men. (See

Figures 4 and 5.) African-American men constitute about six percent of the population in the United States, while comprising forty-eight percent of those incarcerated. In 1995, black men were more than seven times more likely than white men to be incarcerated. There is also a disproportionately large number of Hispanic prisoners, although not as large as that of African-American men. With these figures, how can one dispute the allegations that our criminal system has racist components?

Figure 3

Distribution of Offenses: State and Federal Prisons, 1985 and 1995

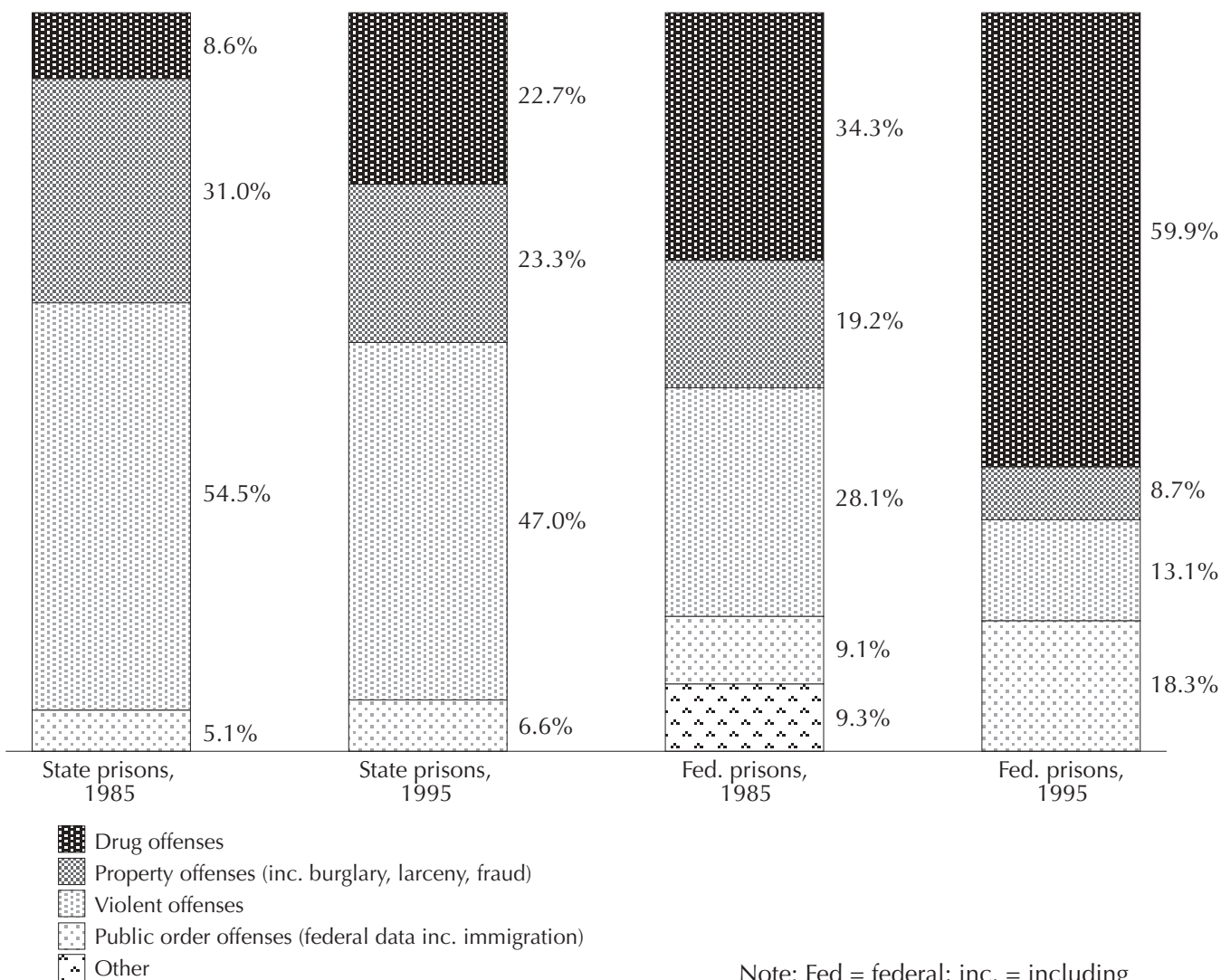
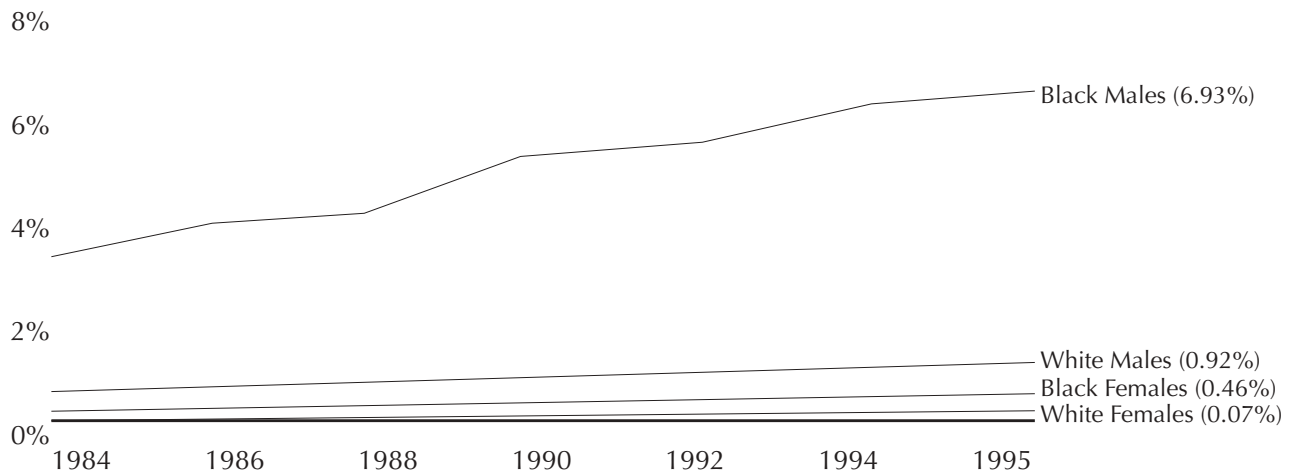


Figure 4

Percent of U.S. Adult Population in State or Federal Prisons or in Local Jails, by Race and Sex, 1984-1995



Note: Reprinted from *Correctional Populations in the United States, 1995* (NCJ 163916), by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997, Rockville, MD: Author. In the public domain.

Haney, C. and Zimbardo, P. write of the crisis in our criminal justice system in very negative terms. "With startling speed, national prison policy has become remarkably punitive, and correspondingly, conditions of confinement have deteriorated in many parts of the country. These transformations have been costly in economic, social and human terms. At the beginning of the present decade, a stark fact about government priorities was reported: 'For the first time in history, state and municipal governments are spending more money on criminal justice than education.' (Chambliss, 1994, *Policing the Ghetto Underclass: The Politics of Law and Law Enforcement*. Social Problems, 41, pp. 177-194.) 'In California, the corrections budget alone has now surpassed the state's fiscal outlays for higher education.' (Butterfeld, F. 1995, April 12, *New Prisons Cast Shadow Over Higher Education*. The New York Times, p.21.) As we have noted, and one reviewer recently observed, 'For over a decade, virtually every contemporary com-

Figure 5

Number of Adults Held in State or Federal Prisons or Local Jails Per 100,000 Adult Residents in Each Group, by Sex and Race, 1985-1995

Years	White		Black	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
1985	528	27	3,544	183
1986	570	29	3,850	189
1987	594	35	3,943	216
1988	629	41	4,441	257
1989	685	47	5,066	321
1990	718	48	5,365	338
1991	740	51	5,717	356
1992	774	53	6,015	365
1993	805	56	6,259	403
1994	851	61	6,682	435
1995	919	68	6,926	456

Note: Data are based on resident population for each group on July 1 of each year. Reprinted from *Correctional Populations in the United States, 1995* (NCJ 163916), by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997, Rockville, MD: Author. In the public domain.

mentary on corrections in the United States has reminded us that the system is in crisis.' (Cullen, F., 1995 *Assessing the Penal Harm Movement*. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 32, pp. 338-358)."

The recently enacted "three strikes" law will not only increase the need for more prison space, but will also, as Haney and Zimbardo have stated, find some people are "likely to be imprisoned for life under scenarios in which they are guilty of little more than a history of untreated addiction and several prior drug-related offenses."

Lessons from the Stanford Prison Experiment

1. Historically, psychology has been only minimally involved in decisions regarding corrections policy.
2. SPE powerfully and convincingly demonstrates how relevant social and situational factors can influence prison behavior, even in mock prison environments involving healthy individuals.
3. Prison administrators should carefully consider the situational and social context factors in order to determine whether or not any prison procedure is cruel and inhumane.
4. "Prison systems should not ignore individual vulnerabilities in attempting to optimize institutional adjustment, minimize behavioral and psychological problems, understand differences in institutional adaptations and capacities to survive, and intelligently allocate treatment and other resources." Haney and Spector, in press.
5. Programs must consider the great importance of social contexts and situational factors that prisoners will encounter when they are released, in order to reduce the rates of recidivism. This factor stresses the importance of training programs which will help prisoners get jobs, housing, counseling and a strong sense of self-efficacy.

The Role of The Pacific Institute in Addressing the Needs of Corrections

We have mentioned early in this issue of THE LETTER that the findings of SPE support early developments as to the emphasis on social-cognitive theory. So it is no coincidence that three of Bandura's publications are cited in the SPE

publication bibliography. Those publications are as follows: (1978) *The Self System in Reciprocal Determinism*, *American Psychologist*, 33, pp. 344-358; (1989) *Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement*, in Reich, W. (Ed.) *Origins of terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, pp. 161-191, New York: Cambridge University Press; and (1991) *Social Cognitive Theory of Moral Thought and Action*, in Kurtines, W. & Gerwitz, J. (Eds.) *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development: Vol. 1. Theory*, pp. 450-102, Hillsdale, NJ: Earlbaum.

The two major emphases of the conclusions of the authors of SPE are on the importance of what they refer to as; a) the social context and situational variables in determining the behavior of inmates in prisons; and b) the importance of training in the prisons of skills which will facilitate their adaptation to life after incarceration. Skills would include how to get and keep a job, secure housing and medical coverage, and most important, how to develop high self-efficacy, or the belief that they are capable of meeting these challenges.

We have demonstrated in our work in California, the United Kingdom, South Africa and other places, that the cognitive skills we teach inmates help reduce recidivism and increase the ability to get and keep a job. We believe that we can assist prison administrators to institute procedures that take into account the crucial importance of creating the kinds of social and situational experiences that were missing in the Stanford Prison Experiment. These experiences will be more conducive to prison adaptation and, most importantly, to adaptation after incarceration. And is not this what we want our prisons to do?



Dr. Glenn Terrell

earned his B.A. in Political Science from Davidson College, his M.S. in

Psychology from Florida State University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa.

Dr. Terrell served as Chairman of the Department of Psychology, University of Colorado, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and as Dean of Faculties at the University of Illinois in Chicago before an 18-year tenure as President of Washington State University. He also served as President of the National Association of State Universities and Colleges, Commissioner for the State of Washington on the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, served on the Board for General Telephone Northwest and West for 23 years, was a Fellow for the Society for Research in Child Development, and a Fellow for the American Psychological Association.

Dr. Terrell has received numerous honorary degrees and awards, among them a listing in Who's Who in America: American Men of Science, and Distinguished Graduate of the Department of Psychology, University of Iowa. He has managed multi-million dollar technology transfers and faculty and student exchange programs throughout the world.

Christy Watson is Director of Marketing for The Pacific Institute, as well as acting as Associate Editor for THE LETTER. In addition to her marketing responsibilities, Christy has played the editor's role in the creation and updating of many Institute programs. A Seattle native, Christy received her B.A. from the University of Washington.