

PRISONS

Budget crisis leads to potential revamping of the prison system

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trails the increase in spending on Medicaid.

The Pew study compares data from jails and prisons over a 25-year period and includes people under community supervision, probation and parole in state and federal systems.

In addition to looking at the total number of people residing in American prisons, the Pew study also observes the effects of race and gender on prison populations.

One in 18 adult men compared to one in 89 adult women are in prison. Among racial and ethnic groups there are also sharp differences. One in 11 black adults, one in 27 Hispanics, and one in 45 whites is in prison.

Some students think that systemic racism in the criminal justice system is to blame for the disproportionate number of blacks in prison.

"The fact that it's mostly black men going to prison says something about racism in this country," said senior Psychology major and former McLeansville

volunteer Sarah Craten. "There is so much criminal profiling for African-Americans."

Other students think blaming the system takes the responsibility away from the criminals.

"If you look at people in a group, you have to look at it as a group of individuals choosing to do something," said senior psychology minor Corey Nelson. "To say that (the disproportionate number of blacks getting arrested) is due to racism takes the responsibility off the people committing the crimes and doesn't offer a constructive solution."

Adam Gelb, the director of the Pew Center's public safety performance project said the study found that when states varied in how many people they locked up, it was a result of policy choices, not crime trends.

"State policy changes got us here and a new round of changes can get us out," said Gelb.

The issue of prison overcrowding and budget cuts has spurred serious debate about America's priorities during difficult financial times.

The \$80 a day spent to house an inmate, compared to the less expensive \$3.50 to \$7.50 a day for probation and parole, has led states to begin to explore less expensive alternatives to prison.

Some Guilford students believe that changing drug laws will lower the prison population.

Dowling's experience at McLeansville has also led her to conclude that the War on Drugs is at least partially responsible for overcrowded prisons.

"Most of the inmates at McLeansville are in prison for drug related crimes," said Dowling. "Furthermore, the War

35." Some states, including North Carolina, have chosen drug rehabilitation programs over prison for some drug offenders. Others have begun to defer sentences in hopes of prison openings.

One possible cut under consideration in North Carolina is the \$9.8 million spent on local mental health treatment, drug treatment courts, and day reporting centers for people on probation, suggested by Governor Bev Purdue.

According to Gelb, every program should get a hard look if it can't show that it is working well. But if programs that help keep people from prison work, it makes sense to increase their funding—not decrease it.

"We need better mental rehabilitation programs," said Craten. "Prisons have become the new asylums. A lot of people commit crimes so they can go to prison because there are better services in prisons than in regular society. You have to ask yourself what we aren't providing these people in society that leads them to committing these crimes."

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Sarah Craten, senior

"(The solution is) to end the Drug War, and by that I mean any possession of any amount or type of drug should be legalized," said Nelson. "It's not like the federal government had a bake sale to raise the money. They're taking your money and spending it on the drug war."

on Drugs arrests and imprisons low level drug dealers, which there happen to be more of, rather than high level drug kings/lords. So really it does very little to get drugs off the streets. Not to mention, most of those low level dealers are young black men between the ages of 18 and

Fair Trade products stabilize

By Thomas Wotherspoon
STAFF WRITER

Although the current recession hasn't affected the production of Fair Trade products much, some in Latin America fear the potential for losses. Here in the United States, economists remain optimistic that Fair Trade products will remain available and bought by the public.

"The issue is how responsive are consumers when their expenditures change," said Voehringer Professor of Economics Robert Williams. "If it's co-ops purchasing these items than it would probably not change."

One of the major products consumed in the United States is coffee. Williams believes that consumers are not likely to change their purchasing habits if they are committed to the policies of the Fair Trade Organization, especially if they are purchasing coffee.

However, some are wary of the influence of large corporations that are already known for making bulk goods available at cheap prices.

"If you look at the last couple of months, the only company with growth is Wal-Mart," said junior economics major Karl Floitgraf. "People aren't going as much to places that specialize with Fair Trade products."

The appeal of Fair Trade products is a guarantee that all products are being produced and traded ethically. Much of the products are stabilized through the organization, with farmers guaranteed competitive wages ahead of their crops.

"Coffee is the most widely traded product in the globe," said senior Shaina Machlus, a member of the Greenleaf co-op. "That's one of the reasons the Fair Trade organization was started: in order to regulate the market fairly."

Machlus went on to say that organizations

like the Greenleaf operate with the intention of providing an ethical alternative to free market goods. Also, the Greenleaf has managed to keep their prices competitive with other distributors.

"Coffee is still cheaper at the Greenleaf than at Starbucks," said Machlus.

However, coffee is not the only product that the Fair Trade organization distributes. Their goods range from organic foods to handicrafts.

Another factor that might help stabilize the Fair Trade products is that all products are protected through an intricate system of pricing. The Fair Trade organization requires both a minimum and a premium price range for their goods depending on the geographical origin of the product and the demand of the product itself.

Floitgraf's mention of Wal-Mart may indeed predict the trend of many consumers from the United States.

However, the global market will probably not change their purchasing habits when it comes to Fair Trade goods.

"The success of Wal-Mart recently is a significant read on the economy," said Floitgraf. "The smaller companies are going to be squeezed out worse and worse than in the past."

This may indicate that independent grocers will receive stiff competition from heavyweights like Trader Joe's and Whole Foods, which offer Fair Trade goods in mass quantities.

In general, however, the products themselves will continue to be consumed by Americans who believe in the policies and decisions of fair trade.

"I have much more faith in fair trade than in the free market," said Machlus.

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