

Increasing Efficiency of Jail Staff

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This is the third of a series on staffing of jails. The first article appeared in the November-December 2005 issue, the second in the January-February 2006 issue. The articles reflect the 10 steps developed by the National Institute of Corrections.

Sheriffs must manage their jail activity schedule, not let it manage them. By rigorously analyzing jail operations, sheriffs can solve staffing problems, more than likely without increasing the budget.

“Develop a Facility Activity Schedule,” the third of a 10-step program on staffing of jails as explained in a workbook by the National Institute of Corrections¹, identifies all the programs, activities, support services, and security functions that take place in the jail and then charts the times they occur over the course of a typical week. This step does not record continuous activities, such as supervising inmates or booking and releasing inmates, which are covered in Step 4.

In the first edition of the NIC workbook, the process of identifying activities was done manually. The blocks of time corresponding to each intermittent activity were shaded and shaded blocks were counted and recorded at the bottom of each column.

The types of intermittent activities that should be recorded include:

- Shift change
- Formal counts or lockdowns
- Meal service.
- Visiting (public or attorney)
- Sick call.
- Clinic times.
- Administering medications
- Court appearances
- Commissary
- Outdoor exercise
- Education classes
- Counseling sessions
- Library hours
- Religious services
- Laundry exchange

¹ **Staffing Analysis Workbook for Jails**, First Edition. Rod Miller and Dennis Liebert. National Institute of Corrections, Washington D.C. 1987. Second Edition published in 2003.

- Inmate transports
- Inmate work activities

The older version of the activity chart has been replaced with a spreadsheet in the *Second Edition* of the workbook. The process has improved since the Institute's workbook was first published, most recently to acknowledge that some activities carry more weight than others.

After your activities have been recorded, devise a chart that arrays them across a typical 24-hour day. This is easily done with the "total" row at the bottom of the worksheet. Figure 1 provides a graph of the activity levels with the times of shift changes.

Figure 1: Sample Graph of Activity Levels

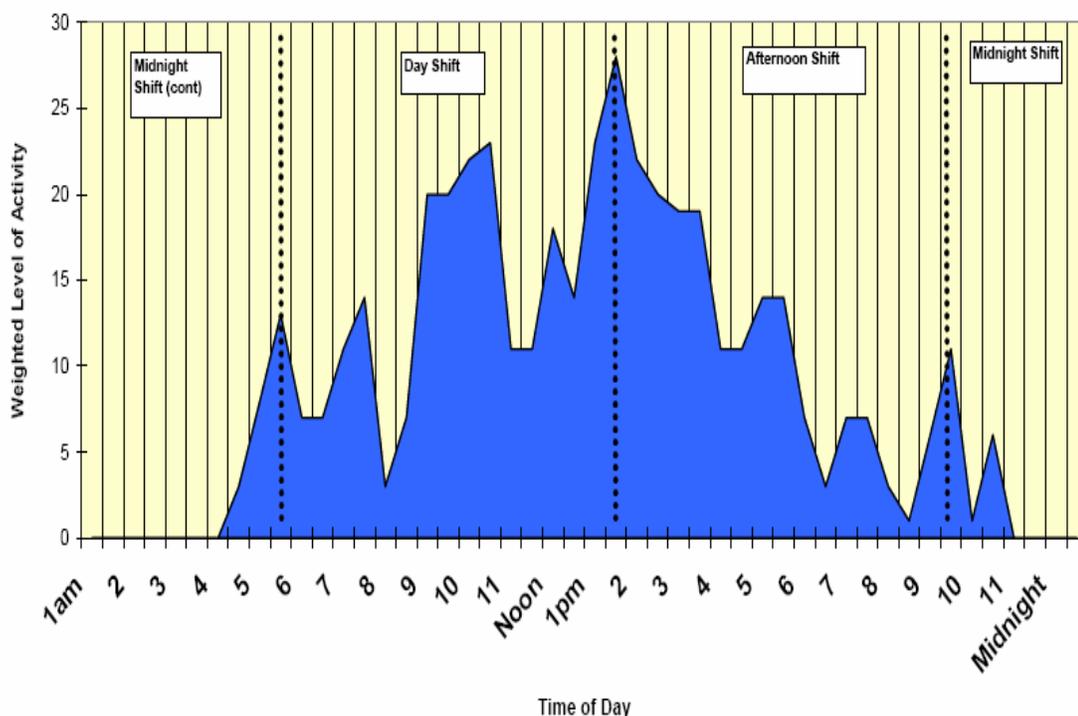
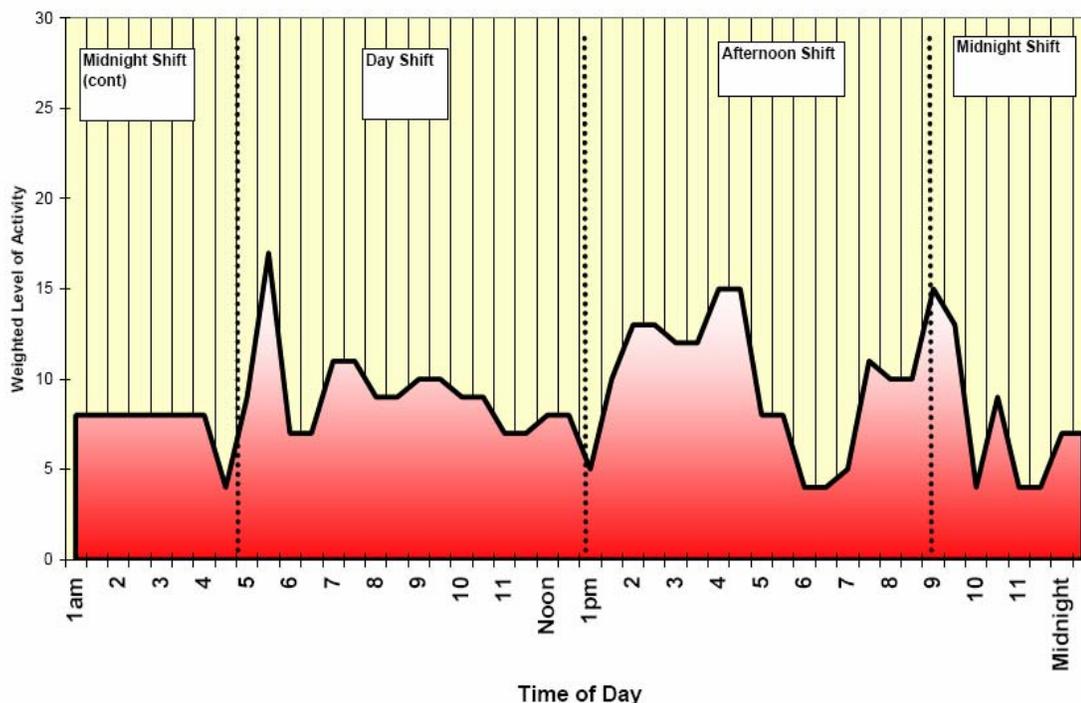


Figure 1 is fairly typical of levels of jail activity. In the sample that was used for Figure 1, staff worked 8-hour shifts that changed at 5:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. As you look at Figure 1 with that in mind, it becomes clear that shift schedules "straddle" higher periods of activity. Even at the end of the midnight shift, there is a major upswing in activity after six hours of relative inactivity.

How do you assign staff to respond to such varying needs? Ask yourself, "How can we adjust our daily activities to improve the fairness and efficiency of our staffing?" Using the activities described in Figure 1, we adjusted the schedule of several activities without increasing or eliminating activities. The changes in the graph are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: “After” Activity Graph

The blue mountains and valleys depict the activity levels before the adjustments. In revising the activity schedule, we sought to:

- Reduce the scale of the peak activities.
- Moderate the level of activity on the day shift.
- Move some activities to the evening shift.
- Increase activities in the midnight shift—when staff usually is underutilized but is needed to ensure response to emergencies.
- Make the work loads for each shift more fair and equitable.

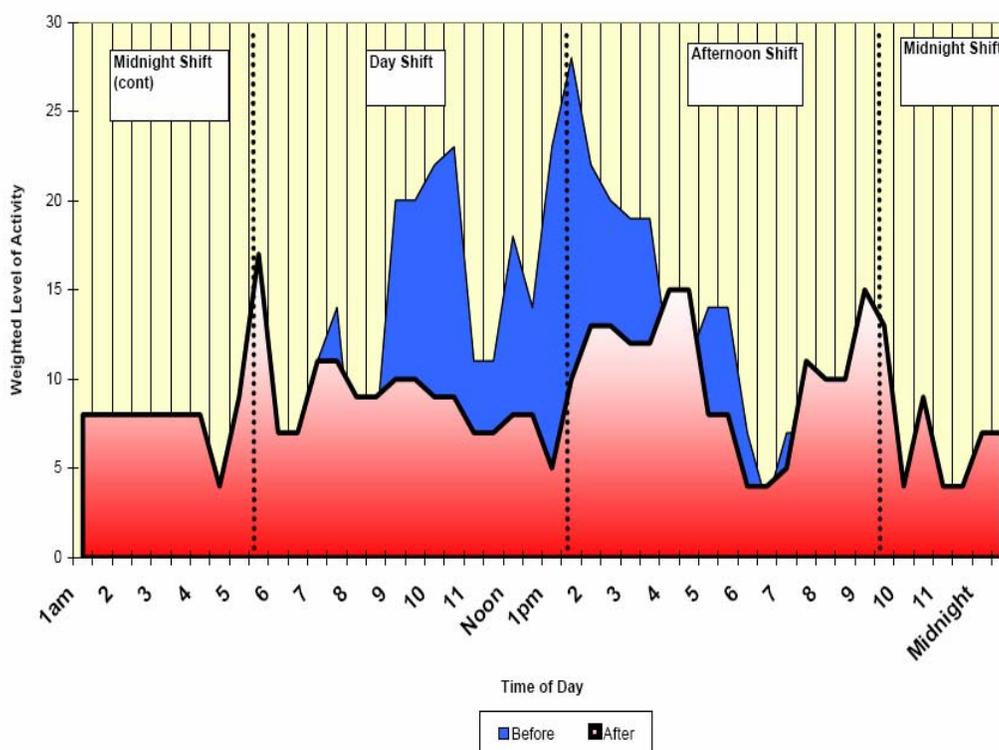
To accomplish these, we adjusted the activity schedule by:

- Moving all of the morning court-line activities to the day shift while still allowing plenty of time for the inmates to be in court on schedule.
- Moving lunch 30 minutes forward to eliminate the conflict with video court.
- Moving the evening meal 30 minutes forward to maintain the appropriate time between meals.
- Denying attorneys access to their clients during meals.
- Moving morning visiting hours to the evening.
- Moving the morning education classes, Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous programs to the evening, which is more consistent with the schedule inmates will encounter in the community and which increases the number of volunteers available in the evening hours.

- Moving mail sorting activities to the midnight shift
- Moving commissary order fulfillment to the midnight shift.
- Moving commissary distribution earlier in the day shift.
- Moving cleaning, records maintenance, court-line scheduling, and rosters to the midnight shift when the level of the skeleton crew is determined by the need to respond to emergencies, but when there are often not enough activities to keep this level of staffing busy.
- Adjusting the exercise schedule to reduce conflicts with meals.

Figure 3 compares the “before” and “after” daily schedules.

Figure 3: “Before” and “After” Daily Schedules



Other adjustments might have been tried, such as concentrating activities on one shift (day and/or evening) that normally have higher staffing levels.

Of course, shifts are only a starting point for your coverage and scheduling activities. Staggering the starting and ending times of posts and positions might prove more efficient for some activities.

Longer shifts often prove efficient and effective. An exercise officer on a 10-hour shift might be able to accomplish all of the tasks associated with that activity.

A supervisor on a 9-hour or 10-hour shift will be able to overlap with the outgoing and incoming shift in a cost-efficient manner. The possibilities are endless.

The staffing analysis process will identify many ways that you can improve your current practices and “work smarter.” Step 3 encourages you to take control of your daily jail activities to make staff work loads more fair, equitable and efficient.

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Dane County Sheriff Gray Hamblin marks staff posts on the board during a three-day staffing analysis training program sponsored by the National Institute of Corrections.