

INTRODUCTION

A. General Description. ALAS (or WINGS, in English) is a bilingual-bicultural program for 50 inmates selected from the Spanish speaking population at the Illinois State Penitentiary, in Stateville (Joliet), 54 miles southwest of Chicago.¹ The project presents an interdisciplinary approach to a pair of explosive national issues: (1) mounting demands for prison reform; and (2) increasing militancy among some 15 million Americans of Mexican and Puerto Rican origins, almost 1 million of them residents of Illinois.² Northwestern University is the official training agency, through its Council for Intersocietal Studies, in Evanston. Scheduled to become operational in August or early September 1972, the program provides intensive pre-vocational and basic education for trainees through assignment of all participants to a 6-day, 48-hour week during three 16-week semesters.

B. Funding. ALAS has a total budget for the first year of over \$100,000, from three separate sources. A direct grant of \$78,500 from the Office of Education's Manpower Development and Training Division, in Washington, covers administrative and instructional costs. Second, the Regional Office of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration and the Illinois Law Enforcement Commission have provided \$19,600 for extensive personal and group counselling. Finally, a pledge of \$12,500 from Peter B. Bensinger, Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections, will underwrite an elaborate three-phase evaluation of the entire project. As in all pilot programs of this nature, the initial outlays for equipment and instructional materials are inevitably higher than in

subsequent years. Efforts are already underway to fund ALAS for the next fiscal year at a substantially lower figure. Hopefully, after ALAS' second year of federal funding, the State of Illinois will be able to pick up the program as a line item in the Department of Corrections budget.³

C. Needs. Prior to ALAS, the federal government had only funded one program specifically aimed at rehabilitation of Spanish-speaking prisoners, Project EMPLEO for Chicanos at San Quentin.⁴ It was not comparable to ALAS in scope or thrust, nor was it truly bilingual and bicultural.⁵ None of the Northeastern states has yet implemented such a program, despite impressive concentrations of Puerto Ricans in their urban centers.⁶

Meanwhile, as Joseph M. Montoya (New Mexico) warned in a Senate speech last year, "A small but growing group in our Spanish-speaking community is beginning to despair of making real progress." Senator Montoya went on to explain that, "It feels only deliberately-fostered turbulence will awaken our power structure and the nation to their needs."⁷ Little imagination is required to appreciate the degree to which prison life can magnify the resentment and despair that alarmed Senator Montoya.

Paramount among the needs of our nation's neglected Latin communities is bilingual-bicultural education, according to Congressman Herman Badillo, from New York's predominantly Puerto Rican 21st District. Apart from preserving and enriching our cultural resources, he pointed out that, "It also imparts an essential sense of identity and cultural pride in the student" More arresting was his complaint that, "Frequently the ethnocentric

nature of our educational system - the poorly conceived effort to acculturate students from diverse backgrounds - has resulted in convincing certain groups that they have no heritage and has perpetuated the status of second-class citizenship for many Americans." 8

I. GOALS

A. Immediate. While the minimum entry requirement for ALAS is only fourth-grade literacy in Spanish or English, preliminary testing of candidates suggests that a majority of those selected for the project have the potential to reach, or come close to, junior high school levels in English. 9 ALAS graduates will thus be able to take advantage of the wide range of programs already available to English speaking inmates.

Three of them merit further mention. First, ALAS will help inmates successfully completing the project to transfer into work release programs before reentering the free world. Second, Joliet Junior College has special courses for English speaking prisoners, such as: Culinary Arts, Accounting and Data Processing, Automobile Mechanics, Mechanical Design Technology, and Production Design Technology. Third, ALAS will improve the prospects of its graduates for transferal into career opportunity programs at the State's model facility in Vienna for minimum security prisoners. Here, Shawnee College conducts a variety of courses structured around present and future demand in the regional labor market. To cite but several, inmates at Vienna can choose from: Business Machine Repair, Drafting, Machine Operator, Food Services, Water Pollution Control, and Welding. 10

Equally if not more important, ALAS endeavors to lessen tensions arising from confinement in a maximum security institution,

and to promote positive attitudes that will improve the trainees' chances of functioning effectively in society after release. In this area, long-range goals begin to overlap with those of an immediate nature.

B. Long-range. Recognizing the sine qua non of proficiency in English and vocational training (whether for blue or white collar jobs), ALAS also believes that skills mean little without motivation. No matter what his level of technical or professional competence, the individual must have sufficient will to make the most of it. ¹¹

If the Spanish speaking inmate is to function properly in the Anglo world outside, and develop his true potential, then he requires a sense of identity. Loss of the latter often results in symptoms of mental illness, as two observers noted several years ago. They explained that:

Identity is the nucleus of the individual's belief system, which serves, in turn, as his blue print for relating to his physical and social environment. When it is lost, the individual finds it difficult to live with himself or to adapt to the reality around him. If he is ever to function viably, he must find the answer to three related questions: (1) Who am I? (2) What is the nature of the society and the world in which I live? (3) How can I relate to it? ¹²

ALAS seeks to reinforce a sense of identity and self-esteem in trainees, by awakening pride in their cultural heritage from Ancient American, Iberian, or African origins.

Through the bilingual-bicultural format, ALAS also builds self-confidence. The project tries to overcome (where it may exist) what has been described as a schizophrenic tendency in

situations when the individual feels rootless and torn between two worlds, without belonging to either. The curriculum and personal counselling should help trainees to overcome feelings of cultural and social inferiority that stem from real or imagined discrimination, or a weak sense of identity. While encouraging inmates to relate to and succeed in the Anglo world, ALAS guides them toward a rediscovery of their own abundant cultural heritage.

Furthermore, there is reason to believe that ALAS will generate what economists refer to as the "multiplier" effect. Its total impact will extend to Spanish speaking peoples throughout the State: first, through former trainees returning to their communities. Second, in conjunction with other recent programs for Latin minorities, it shows that both Springfield and Washington have at last concerned themselves with improving the quality of life for these long overlooked residents of Illinois. 13

Finally, because of its innovations, ALAS should have significant implications for the field of corrections in general, for pre-vocational training and adult education, and for interdisciplinary cross-cultural studies. Involving personnel from two state and one private institution, ALAS would also appear to give some substance to the "common market" of university resources and emphasis upon "socially useful" projects envisioned by the Illinois Board of Higher Education's Master Plan, Phase III. 14

II. ORGANIZATION

ALAS represents a continuing response to specific needs identified over a period of 18 months by the Illinois Department

of Corrections' Office of Educational and Vocational Programs and leaders of Stateville's Spanish speaking population. It incorporates all recommendations made by inmates and correctional officials, and the collective experience of the ALAS Staff, Advisory Council, and friends of the project in both Americas. As presently structured, the project gets input from four principal sources: the Advisory Council, the Illinois Department of Corrections, the ALAS Staff, and the trainees themselves. ¹⁵

A. Advisory Council. At the moment, there are fifteen members. Five are Anglos, including the Illinois Director of Corrections and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Among the four members from Mexican backgrounds, are a Circuit Court Judge of Cook County (Chicago), the Executive Director of the Archdiocese of Chicago's Latin American Committee, and a member of the Protestant clergy. The four Puerto Ricans are: a clergyman (who is also a television producer and has a by-line column in one of Chicago's leading newspapers); the only Latins on the Chicago Board of Education and the Illinois Parole and Pardon Board; and the Regional Director of the Commonwealth's Migrant Labor Division. Two national spokesmen for their respective ethnic groups are Honorary Members: Congressman Herman Badillo and Senator Joseph Montoya, who were both quoted earlier. ¹⁶ The most recent addition to the Advisory Council is Dr. Alfonso Quiros Cuarón, a pioneer in prison reform and dean of Mexico's criminologists. ¹⁷

B. Illinois Department of Corrections. Since ALAS first came to Director Bensinger's attention more than a year ago, he has shown a keen interest in the program. "It is evident that a need exists among Spanish speaking inmates for this type of assistance

so they will develop better communicable and vocational abilities," he declared in July 1971, and assured the project's director of "my personal support for ALAS." Looking beyond Illinois, he was "convinced that it will not only have an impact on our inmates at Joliet, but probably serve as a model for correctional departments in other states. "¹⁸

Urging the Office of Education to fund ALAS in the fall of 1971, the Department of Corrections' Administrator of Educational and Vocational Programs reaffirmed "our commitment to see that ALAS becomes a reality for those inmates for whom it has been developed." He called attention to the "impact that its mere suggestion had made on the inmates at Stateville." Continuous refinement of the project since early 1971 had convinced him that it was "incomparable, what with the personnel and resources that had been gathered," to say nothing of "the feelings that went into it."¹⁹

Though completely self-contained and fiscally independent, ALAS remains subject at all times to overriding considerations of security at Stateville. A prolonged "lock-up" of all prisoners in their cells, such as occurred during the summer of 1971, could paralyze the project. Indeed, the Warden could suspend the program, or even evict ALAS from the institution completely. Staff members accordingly strive to maintain correct and cordial relations with administrative and security personnel at all times. Above all, they are scrupulously careful to avoid being drawn into internal situations; their sole mission is to implement the project and stay out of trouble.²⁰ The real losers would not be ALAS' instructors

and counselors, who with one exception all hold full-time positions elsewhere, but Stateville's Spanish speaking population.

C. ALAS Staff. Only one instructor is an Anglo; appropriately, he teaches the course in American Civilization. The rest are South American (1), Mexican or Mexican American (3), and Puerto Rican (3), reflecting a similar parity between the two latter groups in Illinois' total population of 11,000,000, and among Spanish speaking inmates at Stateville. The careers of these instructors, who are mostly in their thirties, remind trainees that Latins can and do get ahead in the continental United States - and without renouncing the language and culture of their forefathers. In addition to their academic qualifications, all have had previous correctional experience or worked with disadvantaged minority groups. The complete ALAS Staff spans seven separate disciplines: Accounting, Education, English, History, Psychology, Sociology, and Spanish.²¹

Whereas a professional teaching staff of three "fully certified teachers of Mexican-American ancestry" may have sufficed for the objectives of San Quentin's Project EMPLEO, in California, the challenge in Illinois was somewhat more complex.²² Two very distinct and often hostile ethnic groups in the Spanish speaking population at Stateville required equal representation. Both inmates and correctional officials expressed a common preference for college or university personnel. Besides depth and experience in his special field of competence, this type of instructor is accustomed to dealing with young adults, who comprise the majority of prisoners in American penitentiaries today. Unless they happen to conduct evening classes for adults, teachers from the public school system have only had contact with small children or