



IRONWOOD STATE PRISON
WARDEN DEBRA HERNDON
ONE-YEAR AUDIT

**OFFICE OF THE
INSPECTOR GENERAL**

**DAVID R. SHAW
INSPECTOR GENERAL**

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

NOVEMBER 2009



November 18, 2009

Matthew L. Cate, Secretary
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
1515 S Street, Room 502 South
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Mr. Cate:

Enclosed is the Office of the Inspector General's audit report concerning the performance of Warden Debra Herndon at the Ironwood State Prison (ISP). The purpose of the audit was to satisfy our statutory requirement to audit each warden one year after appointment.

Our review found that Warden Herndon's managers and other employees rated her management skills and qualities as very good to outstanding. Furthermore, most institutional employees we surveyed consider Warden Herndon to be an effective leader, given all of the institution's challenges.

If you have questions concerning this draft report, please contact Jerry Twomey, Chief Assistant Inspector General, Bureau of Audits and Investigations, at (916) 830-3610.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David R. Shaw".

David R. Shaw
Inspector General

cc: Debra Herndon, Associate Director, Female Offender Programs and Services
Scott Kernan, Chief Deputy Secretary, Adult Operations
Suzan Hubbard, Director, Adult Institutions
Elizabeth Siggins, Chief Deputy Secretary (A), Adult Programs
Kim Holt, External Audits Manager

Enclosure


Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor



Contents

Results in Brief	1
One-Year Evaluation of Warden Debra Herndon	2
Background of Warden	2
Institution Overview	2
Objectives, Scope, and Methodology	4
Review Results	6
Safety and Security	6
Inmate Programming	10
Business Operations	12
Employee-Management Relations	15
Overall Summary	18
Appendix – Employee Survey Response	20
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s Response	22

Results in Brief

Overall, most give Debra Herndon high marks as warden

From its review, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) found that Warden Herndon has successfully performed her job as warden at Ironwood State Prison (ISP). With over 23 years of correctional experience with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), she has obtained the skills necessary to manage a unique prison like ISP.

Almost all ISP employees we interviewed told us the institution's operations have improved since she became warden in October 2007. While we found some areas that the warden could improve upon, many employees we spoke to told us that she is the best warden they have ever known.

During our review, we surveyed ISP employees, key stakeholders, and department executives; analyzed operational data compiled and maintained by the department; interviewed ISP employees, including the warden; and toured the institution. We compiled the results and categorized them into four areas: safety and security, inmate programming, business operations, and employee-management relations. We received mainly positive responses regarding the warden's performance. On average, the warden's managers and employees rated her between very good and outstanding.

In April 2009, the department temporarily assigned Warden Herndon to headquarters as acting Associate Director, Female Offender Programs and Services, and as of August 2009 she was still serving in that assignment. In her absence, Gary Sandor, Chief Deputy Warden of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison is serving as ISP's acting warden.

IRONWOOD STATE PRISON FACTS AT A GLANCE

Location: Blythe, CA

Opened: 1994

Mission: Minimum and Medium Security

Inmate Population: 4,041

Designed Capacity: 2,200 inmates

Employees: 1,230

Budget: \$163 million, FY 2008-09



Warden Debra Herndon

One-Year Evaluation of Warden Debra Herndon

California Penal Code section 6126(a)(2) requires the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) to audit each warden of an institution one year after his or her appointment. To satisfy this requirement, we evaluated Warden Herndon's performance at Ironwood State Prison (ISP) since her appointment in October 2007.

Background of Warden Herndon

Warden Herndon began her career as an office assistant for the California State Personnel Board in 1981 and later held the same job for the Department of Corrections. In 1986, she became a correctional officer at Folsom State Prison, and in 1991, she promoted to correctional sergeant at Calipatria State Prison. In the ensuing years, she worked as a correctional counselor I, correctional lieutenant, correctional counselor II, and correctional counselor III at CDCR headquarters. In July 2002, Herndon transferred to Centinela State Prison as a correctional captain. She promoted to correctional administrator in 2005 and was responsible for the operation of Complex II at Centinela State Prison. In 2006, she promoted to chief deputy warden at Ironwood State Prison, and in February 2007, she was appointed as the acting warden. In October 2007, Governor Schwarzenegger appointed Herndon as the Ironwood State Prison warden.

Institution Overview

Ironwood State Prison opened on February 1, 1994. ISP has 1,230 employees and a fiscal year 2008-09 operating budget of \$163 million (including medical, dental, and mental health services). Although ISP was designed to house 2,200 inmates, as of April 20, 2009, it housed 4,041 male inmates or 184 percent of its design capacity.

Inmate Housing

ISP is located next to Chuckawalla Valley State Prison (CVSP) on approximately 1,540 acres of State-owned property, of which ISP encompasses approximately 350 acres. The prison complex occupies an estimated 120 acres with the remaining acreage used for erosion control, drainage ditches, and catch basins. CVSP also provides fire protection for ISP because ISP does not have its own firehouse.



Aerial view of Ironwood State Prison

ISP has four Level III facilities and a Level I facility. Each of the Level III facilities contains five housing units with each housing unit having 100 cells. One of the Level III housing units in Facility A is designated as the administrative segregation unit. The Level I facility has two 100-bed dormitory style housing units, which are outside the main institution's perimeter fence. Within the main institution, four gymnasiums have been converted into temporary 120-bed Level III dormitories.

Rehabilitation Programs

ISP offers various work, education, and rehabilitation programs. For example, the prison's vocational opportunities include office services, janitorial services, graphic arts, plumbing, masonry, landscape and gardening, welding, electrical work and auto body, among others. ISP's academic offerings include adult basic education, General Educational Development, independent study, high school/college programs, and distance learning. ISP also offers self-help programs including religious services, veterans groups, drug treatment/diversion, anger management and parenting, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Narcotics Anonymous.

Budget and Staffing

For fiscal year 2008-09, ISP's budget for institution and education operations was \$120 million plus \$43 million for medical operations. ISP has more than 1,300 budgeted positions, including 766 custody positions (or 58.7 percent of the budgeted positions). The table below compares ISP's budgeted and filled positions as of December 31, 2008. Overall, the institution filled 94.2 percent of its total budgeted positions during our review period.

Table 1: Staffing Levels at Ironwood State Prison

Position	Filled Positions	Budgeted Positions	Percent Filled
Custody	766	786	97.5%
Education	51	57	89.5%
Medical	165	201	82.1%
Support (includes Trades)	238	250	95.2%
Management	10	12	83.3%
Total	1230	1306	94.2%

Source: Ironwood State Prison Budget Office, ending December 31, 2008. Unaudited data.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

To fulfill our objective of assessing the warden’s performance, we employed a three-part approach. First, we used surveys to solicit opinions and comments from employees, department management team members, and other stakeholders. Next, we analyzed operational data maintained by the department and compared it with the averages for like institutions¹ and all institutions statewide. In addition, we reviewed relevant reports prepared by the department or other external agencies. Finally, we visited the institution to interview various employees and follow-up on noteworthy concerns we identified from the surveys, operational data, or reports.

To understand how the staff members and other stakeholders view the warden’s performance, we sent surveys to three distinct groups: department and ISP managers, ISP employees, and key stakeholders outside the department. For our employee survey, we randomly selected 257 of the institution’s employees and sent them a survey. The survey provides us with information about employees’ perception of the warden’s overall performance plus information about specific operational areas at the prison—Safety and Security, Inmate Programming, Business Operations, and Employee-Management Relations.

To simplify our analysis of the survey results, we grouped survey respondents into three employment categories: Custody, Health Care, and Other (which includes employees in education, plant operations, administration, and clerical positions.) Then, to identify strong trends or patterns, we classified the responses to our questions as either positive or negative. For example, if the respondent ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with our question, we classified it as positive; and, if the respondent ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ with our question we classified it as negative.

Our inspectors also analyzed operational data maintained by the department (called COMPSTAT – comparable statistics) and analyzed the responses to our surveys. We also reviewed relevant reports related to the institution’s operations prepared by the department or external agencies. From these efforts we identified strong trends or

¹ Institutions with a similar mission include: Avenal State Prison, California Correctional Center, California Rehabilitation Center, California State Prison – Solano, Chuckawalla Valley State Prison, Correctional Training Facility, Folsom State Prison, and Sierra Conservation Center.

patterns – either negative or positive – or other issues to help us identify topics for further review and evaluation during our on-site visit to ISP.

During our visit to ISP, we gained insight into the work environment in which the warden works. We interviewed certain key employees and other randomly selected employees, using information gathered from our analysis of statistical information and from employee surveys to identify potential issues for review. Our interviews involved employees in various operational areas throughout the prison, including:

- Business services
- Educational programs
- Employee/labor relations
- Food services
- Health care
- Housing units
- Information technology
- Inmate appeals
- Inmate assignments
- Inmate case records
- In-service training
- Investigative services
- Litigation
- Personnel assignment
- Human resources
- Plant operations
- Receiving and release
- Use-of-force review
- Warehouse management

We performed a site visit the week of March 23, 2009. During our site visit, we interviewed 53 individuals throughout the prison to describe and rate the warden's performance. These individuals included custody employees, executive management team members, education and health care professionals, and an inmate representative from the Inmate Advisory Council.

Review Results

We found that most responding stakeholders, including CDCR (department) management, institutional managers, and employees believe the warden is performing at a level ranging from very good to outstanding. In the four categories of safety and security, inmate programming, business operations, and employee-management relations, we received mostly positive answers.

Category 1: Safety and Security

The department's primary mission is to enhance public safety through safe and secure incarceration of offenders. The importance of safety and security is embodied in the department's requirement that custodial security and the safety of staff, inmates, and the public must take precedence over all other considerations in the operation of all the department's programs and activities. As shown in Table 2 above, 79 percent of the prison employees we surveyed had positive opinions about the safety and security of the institution.

Table 2: Safety and Security – Employee Survey Results

Respondents	Positive	Negative
Custody	84%	16%
Health Care	78%	22%
Admin, Plant Operations, and Other	74%	26%
Weighted Average	79%	21%

Source: OIG survey of ISP employees. See Appendix for details.

After considering the interviews in conjunction with comments from the warden, results from our employee survey, and departmental data on segregation housing and use of force incidents, we noted three areas for discussion: Use of Force, Administrative Segregation Unit, and Overall Safety and Security.

Use of Force

When warranted by the circumstances, employees use varying levels of force to overcome inmate resistance or gain compliance with an order. Employees must report to institutional management whenever using force greater than verbal persuasion. Use of force options include:

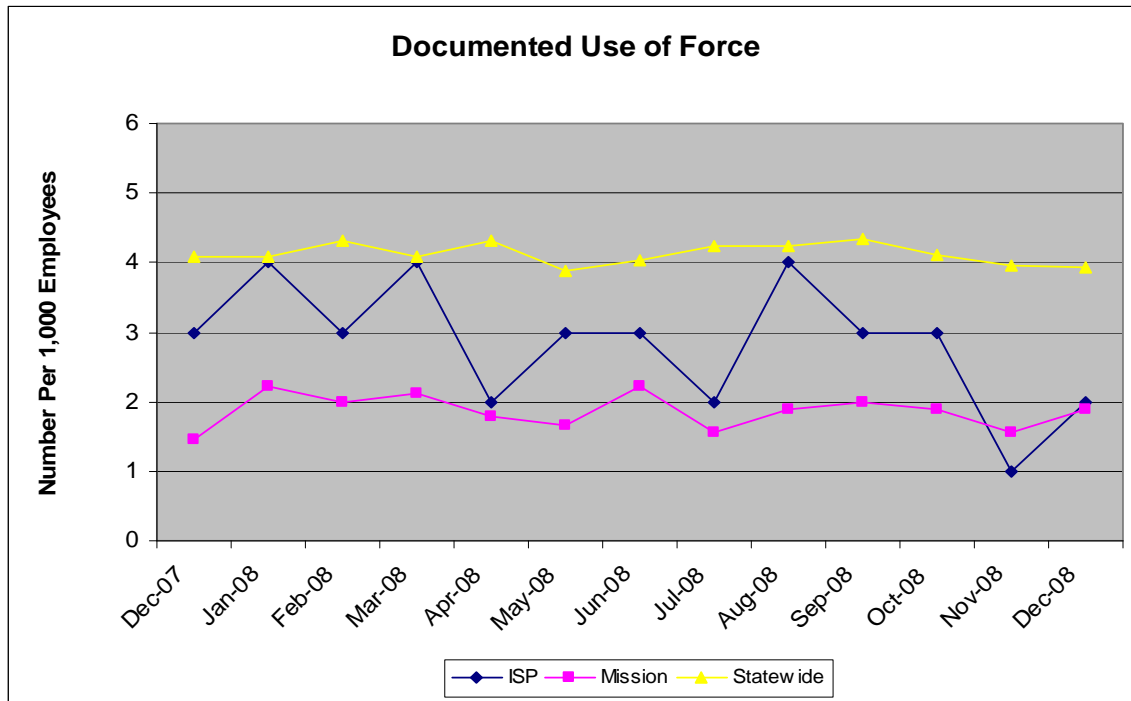
- Chemical agents
- Hand-held batons
- Physical strength and holds
- Less-lethal weapons (i.e. 37mm direct launcher)
- Lethal weapons (firearm)

Employee survey responses, interviews and data analysis revealed some issues regarding the use of force. As illustrated in Chart 1, documented use of force at ISP was below the statewide average but higher than institutions with similar missions. Use of force declined the last two months of our review period to below or at the same level as institutions with similar missions. During our on-site interviews, the public information officer, one correctional sergeant, and several captains explained that use of force may be higher at ISP than institutions with similar missions because of several large riots caused

by prison gangs. One captain further explained that they have a large population of prison gangs that tend to be more violent than other groups. The captain also explained that the younger prisoners do not care if they commit violent acts and are subdued with use of force. In one particular riot, prison gang members severely beat two correctional officers and injured at least six other custody employees. Use of force was required to quell the riots and regain control of various yards and dining halls.

According to the use-of-force coordinator, the warden has really “brought people up to speed” and helped the use-of-force appeals process by reducing backlogs. The use-of-force coordinator also told us the prior administration was lax and overdue with many of their use-of-force appeals, but Warden Herndon is adamant about keeping up with the caseload. When we asked Warden Herndon about use of force and violence issues, she stated that she actively investigates and locks down the institution when there is a riot or incident. She also mentioned two policy changes, as described later in this report, to help reduce riots that should ultimately have a positive effect on use-of-force incidents.

Chart 1:



Source: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, COMPSTAT ending December 31, 2008, Ironwood State Prison. Unaudited data.

Administrative Segregation Unit

Institutions temporarily place inmates who threaten the institution’s safety and security in administrative segregation units (ASU). Inmates remain in administrative segregation until staff members assess the level of threat the inmates pose to the institution, conduct the required due process hearings, and determine where to relocate the inmates upon completion of their segregated housing term. While placing problem inmates in segregation units plays an important role in prison population management, it does so at

an increased cost per inmate. By conducting timely due process hearings and investigations, and by avoiding other delays in releasing inmates from segregated housing units, institutions can minimize an inmate's length of stay and effectively save the department money while protecting the inmate's due process rights and maintaining institutional safety.

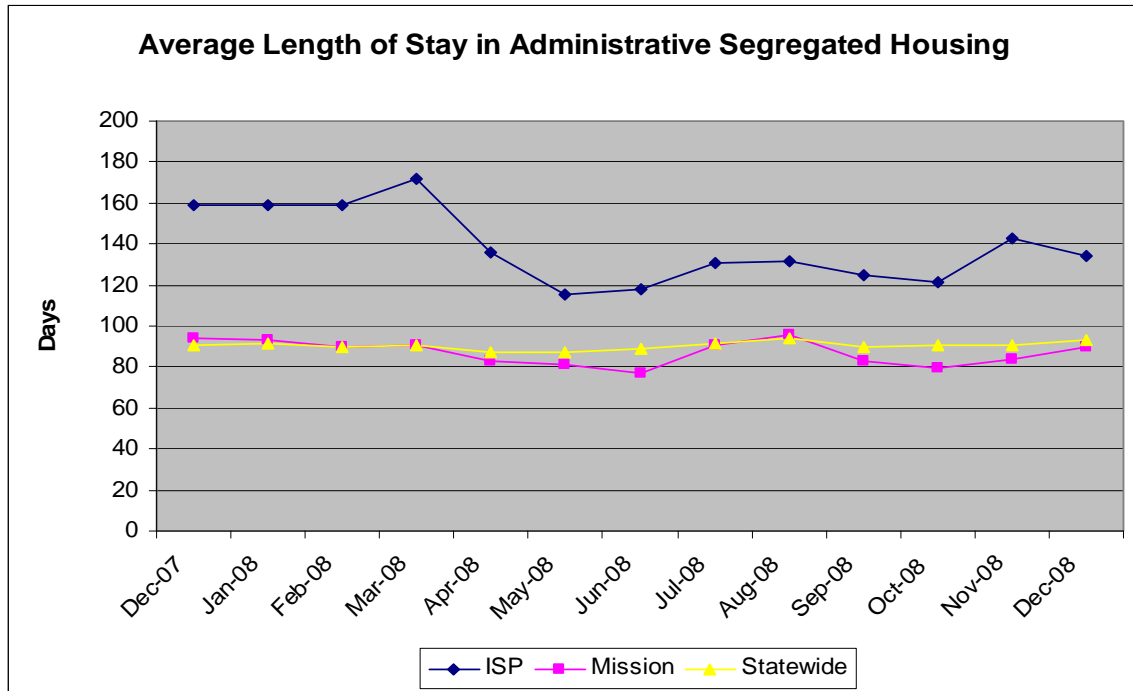
Our initial review of department data in Chart 2 revealed that the average ASU length of stay at ISP was longer than both the statewide and mission average. We also noted a 2008 department review of the institution's ASU that identified occurrences where inmate reviews and associated forms were not completed on time. These delays may have increased the inmate's time in ASU. When asked about this issue, an ISP manager stated that ISP submitted a corrective action plan to address the department's concern about ASU management. The manager also stated that as part of the corrective action plan, ISP is now auditing all ASU cases to ensure that employees complete their reviews and ASU related forms before the deadlines. During our interviews, custody managers, gang investigators, and correctional counselors provided three reasons why inmate stays in ASU are above the statewide average.

First, they said that ISP has made a tremendous push to get violent inmates out of the general population areas. One such push put many suspected gang members into segregated housing while awaiting gang validation. Under such circumstances, the inmates may stay longer in ASU because the gang validation process is lengthy. Moreover, if an inmate is validated as a gang member, he must wait in administrative segregation until a bed opens at Pelican Bay State Prison or another prison that houses gang members.

Second, a high number of inmates in ISP ASU are trying to be reassigned to prisons with Sensitive Needs Yards (SNY), and the placement process is lengthy and beds are scarce. Prisons with SNY allow inmates who have legitimate safety concerns to serve their sentences with less fear of being injured or retaliated against by other inmates. Because these inmates must wait in segregated housing until a permanent SNY bed can be located, the waiting period tends to increase the average length of stay in ASU.

Lastly, employees mentioned the high number of inmates in ASU awaiting court trials for in-prison assaults with weapons. These inmates remain in segregated housing pending court adjudication.

Chart 2:



Source: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, COMPSTAT ending December 31, 2008, Ironwood State Prison. Unaudited data.

Overall Safety and Security

Most employees told us that they feel safer and more secure with Warden Herndon than with previous wardens. For example, several employees told us that after one particularly bad riot in D-Yard’s dining halls, the warden immediately added armed personnel to the dining halls and instituted a strict seating policy for inmates. The employees told us they appreciated the measures the warden took.

One safety and security area that concerned employees was the prevalence of inmates with cell phones, which are prohibited. Some ISP employees told us that inmates with cell phones are a major safety concern because inmates can continue criminal activity by making unmonitored calls. Further, some employees expressed concern that poor security procedures over employees entering the prison may be increasing the number of cell phones that get into the prison. In fact, during our week at the prison, we observed variations in the security procedures with some employees carefully checking all IDs, bags, and large lunch coolers while others did not. When we asked the warden about cell phones entering the institution, she stated that she is currently working on better bag and ID checking procedures and is even considering limiting the size of the lunch coolers and bags that employees are allowed to bring into the prison.

On a positive note, several custody captains told us that Warden Herndon has been instrumental in developing ISP’s Incident Command System under which security and command procedures are used in the event of a major incident or catastrophe at ISP. The warden has used the Incident Command System at least once since her appointment.

Category 2: Inmate Programming

Research shows that inmate programs can reduce the likelihood that offenders will commit new crimes and return to prison. In fact, a 2006 Washington State Institute for Public Policy study of adult

basic and vocational education programs found that such programs reduce inmate recidivism by an average of 5.1 percent and 12.6 percent, respectively.² The department recognizes these benefits and provides academic and vocational training and a number of self-help and self improvement services including substance abuse programs to inmates. An added benefit is that programming requires inmates to have a more structured day and less idle time. As a general rule, inmates with a structured day tend to be easier to manage. As a result, the institution’s safety and security can be affected by the amount of available inmate programming.

Table 3: Inmate Programming – Employee Survey Results

Respondents	Positive	Negative
Custody	78%	22%
Health Care	95%	5%
Admin, Plant Operations, and Other	73%	27%
Weighted Average	79%	21%

Source: OIG Employee Survey. See Appendix for details.

Overall, as shown in Table 3 above, 79 percent of all respondents gave favorable ratings to questions related to inmate programming. After our analysis of the information gathered from departmental statistics, employee survey results, and employee interviews, we found two areas for more detailed comment: Inmate Attendance and Other Programming.

Inmate Program Attendance

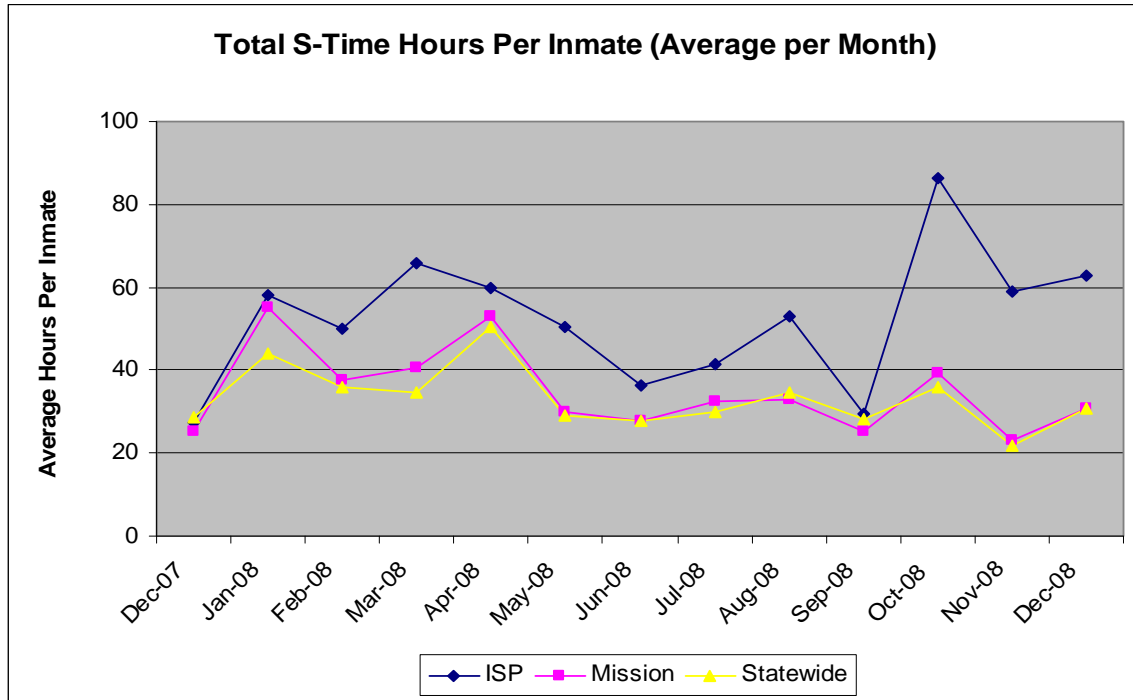
The department establishes the amount of time that assigned inmates must attend academic and vocational training classes each day. As a result, each institution can be evaluated as to how effectively it complies with school-day attendance requirements because administrators must track inmate class absences. The department refers to absences caused by circumstances beyond the inmate’s control as “S-time.” Such absences may result from security-related needs such as lockdowns, modified programming, investigations, and inmate medical appointments. Education-related absences, such as teachers calling in sick, also contribute to S-time. The lost time is measureable and is tracked by the department. Institutions with high or increasing patterns of S-time indicate that prison management may be ineffectively using their academic and vocational programs, or even wasting the resources that give the inmates what they need to succeed upon parole.

Maximizing an inmate’s exposure to rehabilitative programming is a positive step towards reducing recidivism. Conversely, the amount of time that inmates do not receive normal programming can indicate an inefficient use of both institutional teaching resources and available inmate programming time. Chart 3 reflects the average per inmate S-Time at ISP, which is generally greater than both the statewide and mission

² Washington State Institute for Public Policy, “Evidence-Based Adult Corrections Programs: What Works and What Does Not,” January 2006.

averages. In addition, October through December 2008 showed significant spikes in S-Time. When we inquired about these spikes, the education principal told us the increased S-Time occurred when two large riots resulted in inmate lockdowns and prevented the inmates from attending their programming activities.

Chart 3:



Source: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, COMPSTAT ending December 31, 2008, Ironwood State Prison. Unaudited data.

Other Programming

Employees told us that Warden Herndon was instrumental in developing a program that gives inmates the opportunity to earn money translating text into Braille. More importantly, the employees said these job skills provide lucrative job opportunities after incarceration.

ISP also provides online college classes in which inmates receive the same education and materials as regular students at Palo Verde College. The ISP education principal commented that ISP has the most successful online prison college program in the state with the highest graduation rates.

Category 3: Business Operations

An institution’s business operations include budget planning and control, personnel administration, accounting and procurement services, employee training and development, and facility

maintenance and operations. It is important for the warden to be knowledgeable in these areas to effectively perform her duties.

Table 4: Business Operations – Employee Survey Results

Respondents	Positive	Negative
Custody	58%	42%
Health Care	81%	19%
Admin, Plant Operations, and Other	68%	32%
Weighted Average	66%	34%

Source: OIG survey of ISP employees. See Appendix for details.

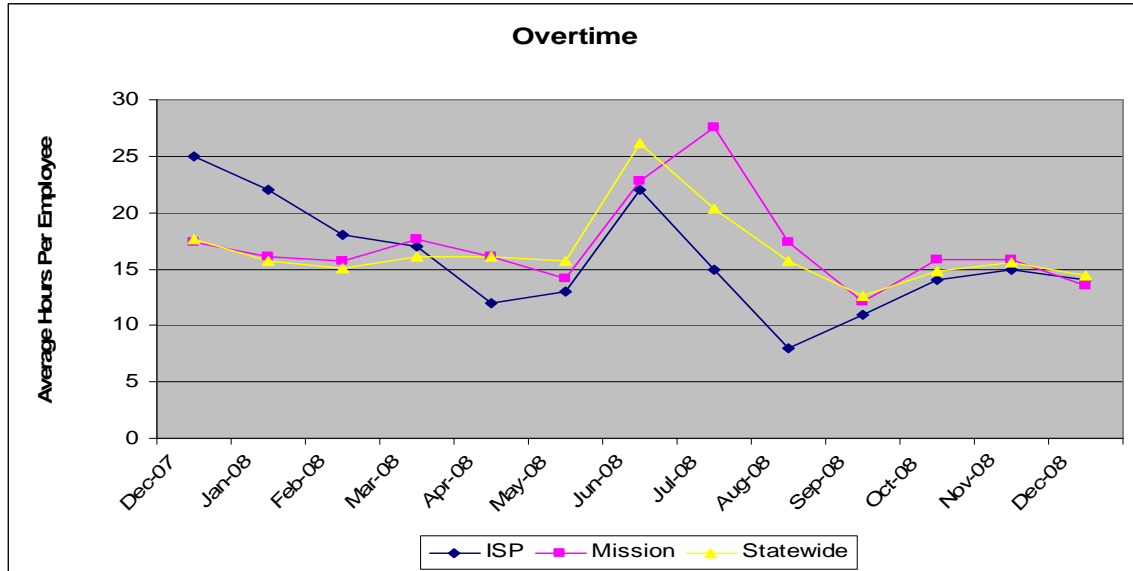
As shown in Table 4, 66 percent of the prison employees had positive responses about the institution’s business operations and 34 percent had negative responses. Our analysis of the information gathered from the department’s data, employee survey responses, and employee interviews uncovered five areas that we discussed further with the warden and other management team members: Overtime Usage, Budget, Plant Operations and Maintenance, Personnel and Hiring, and Medical Transportation.

Overtime Usage

The control of overtime is one indicator of a warden’s ability to manage an institution’s overall operations because it requires the warden to ensure that good budgeting, planning, and personnel administration practices are in place. To assess ISP’s overtime usage, we compared its overtime statistics to both the statewide average for all prisons, as well as the average for the other prisons with a similar medium security mission.

As displayed in Chart 4, overtime was high in December 2007 and January 2008 but steadily dropped as the year progressed. In June 2008, however, overtime usage significantly increased. According to the department’s Office of Personnel Services, overtime hours for June were inflated because a double-pay period occurred in that month. Bargaining unit 6 employees are paid every four weeks, and as a result, every year two pay periods occur within one month—thereby inflating employees’ average hours of overtime for that monthly reporting period. When we spoke with custody and non-custody employees at the institution about overtime usage in the summer, they told us it had to do with the increased sick leave usage during the summer months (June and July). They said that increased sick leave usage causes employees to be held over to work overtime shifts when a significant number of co-workers fail to report to work.

Chart 4:



Source: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, COMPSTAT ending December 31, 2008, Ironwood State Prison. Unaudited data.

Even though 69 percent of our survey respondents felt there are enough employees to get all the required work done in their area, the sick leave usage seems to be an ongoing problem. In one area of the institution, a supervisory employee stated, “Sick calls are too frequent . . . one or two staff call in sick all the time!” Warden Herndon and some of her management team confirmed that sick leave usage seems to be the main reason for increased overtime usage. To combat sick leave abuse and the resulting overtime, Warden Herndon told us that she implemented a sick leave accountability program in July 2008. ISP managers closely monitor sick leave usage and issue Letters of Instruction to employees when the managers observe sick leave abuses. It appears that the warden’s accountability program is working because according to the ISP correctional business manager the sick leave usage dropped from 87,353 hours in FY 07/08 to 41,741 hours in FY 08/09.

Budget

During our surveys and interviews, budget concerns surfaced as an issue at ISP. However, nearly all respondents thought budget problems were mostly outside of the warden’s control, such as the current state budget crisis and employee furlough program. Nevertheless, a couple of people questioned the warden’s decision to spend money on retiling (Figure 1) the



Figure 1 – Tile Project in Administration Building

administration building when they felt funds should be spent on other ISP areas or supplies. When we asked the warden about the retiling project, she responded that ISP desperately needed to retiling some of the bathrooms and the main hallways. According to Warden Herndon, the bathroom tiles were worn and in poor condition and the walkways had not been replaced in years. Warden Herndon also stated that the administration building improvements were approved and funds appropriated before the current department and state budget problems.

Plant Operations and Maintenance

Our employee survey indicates a 61 percent overall favorable response to plant operations and maintenance issues. As we assessed plant operations and maintenance issues during our fieldwork, ISP employees told us about a rat infestation problem at the prison. When we asked other employees, including custody employees, about the rat infestation and other plant operations and maintenance issues, they stated that Warden Herndon is actively working on those issues. For example, the warden stated that she has instituted food and trash disposal guidelines and placed traps to address the rat infestation.

Interview comments regarding plant operations and maintenance include the following:

- “Operations are better since Warden Herndon came to ISP because we get more support from administration. Plant operations maintenance has improved over the last year too. Whenever we need something fixed, they come right away and do a good job.”
- “There was some animosity between plant operations and canteen employees but Warden Herndon took care of the problem and things now seem to be going well.”
- “We always have a reasonable plant operations response.”

To address this and other plant operations issues, Warden Herndon stated that she is facilitating open discussion and input from employees during meetings or by directly meeting with the employee to discuss their issues.

Personnel and Hiring

Prison employees raised concerns in both the employee survey and interviews about the warden’s hiring practices. Several survey respondents and two interviewees commented that the warden favors hiring certain ethnic groups or that she hired people who she knows. To address this concern, we reviewed a list of the last ten people prison-wide that the warden hired. We found the hires to be of various ethnic groups and it appeared the warden had not favored any particular group.

Medical Transportation

Medical transportation is the last major business operations issue assessed during our fieldwork. Some employees listed medical transportation costs as a major issue for them and the institution. For example, one transportation employee told us that several times this year, the medical transportation team transported inmates three to four hours away only to find out that either the receiving hospital had failed to notify the institution that the appointments had been canceled, the institution's medical personnel had not notified the transportation unit of the cancelation, or the institution's medical personnel may have provided the transportation team, and therefore the hospital staff, with incomplete medical files. Consequently, the medical transportation team incurred unproductive time and most likely overtime.

Warden Herndon acknowledged that medical transportation has many difficulties and costs. An associate warden also stated that a good portion of the overtime budget goes to the medical transportation team when they transport inmates to outside hospitals. However, most survey respondents and interviewed employees felt that medical transportation costs are mostly out of the warden's control. Warden Herndon stated that she is working closely with the Chief Medical Officer to resolve medical transportation issues and reduce associated costs. One idea that the warden suggested was not to send inmates on routine medical appointments during state holidays. This would reduce high overtime costs for custody employees traveling on those days.

Category 4: Employee-Management Relations

“Successful leaders invite communication, listen well, and prove themselves trustworthy by exhibiting rational, caring, and predictable behavior in their interpersonal relationships.”³

The warden's ability to communicate plays an important role in employee relations and is vital in implementing the department's vision and mission at the institution level. Not only must the warden interact with employees at all levels and communicate instructions and directions clearly and effectively, but the warden must also communicate effectively with departmental headquarters as well as the surrounding community.

As shown in Table 5 above, 82 percent of the prison employees had positive opinions about various areas related to employee-management relations. Although the opinions of employees and other stakeholders provide one measure of the warden's employee-management relations, another measure can be found in the number of grievances filed by the institution's employees. Our analysis of employees' responses to our surveys,

Table 5: Employee-Management Relations – Employee Survey Results

Respondents	Positive	Negative
Custody	84%	16%
Health Care	75%	25%
Admin, Plant Operations, and Other	81%	19%
Weighted Average	82%	18%

Source: OIG survey of ISP employees. See Appendix for details.

³ *Correctional Leadership Competencies for the 21st Century*, U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections (December 2006).

interviews with the warden's management team and other employees, and statistics on employee grievances resulted in four topics for further consideration: Institutional Communication, External Community Relations, Employee Grievances, and Other Employee-Management Relations.

Institutional Communication

Warden Herndon's overall rating in employee-management relations is favorable, with 82 percent positive responses in the employee survey. However, some individuals commented they had difficulty getting in to see the warden. When we asked the warden about this issue, she stated that she has an open door policy. However, given her busy schedule and nature of work, she prefers employees first try to resolve issues at the lowest possible level. Most in-person respondents stated the warden is always easy to approach and to visit. Other respondents and interviewees told us many positive things about the warden's communication with ISP employees such as her approachable and caring attitude towards employees. One survey respondent stated, "Warden Herndon has done a much better job than her predecessors in communicating with both staff and inmates. She tends to be more proactive instead of reactive and holds everyone accountable."

External Community Relations

One major recurring theme throughout our review was that Warden Herndon has actively built strong ties and relationships to the ISP community and surrounding areas. She has conducted town hall meetings and strengthened relationships between local law enforcement and ISP employees as evidenced by stories in the local newspaper. Warden Herndon also informed us that the institution has donated excess or unused equipment to the sheriff's department and local schools. One interviewee commented that, "She has made tremendous strides in the community. There were some informal community involvement promises made to the city of Blythe when ISP first opened. She has finally made good on those promises."

Employee Grievances

Employee grievances often arise from perceived departures from established union agreements, department operating procedures, and labor laws or fair labor practices. All employees have the right to appeal any grievance relating to their employment. When we reviewed department grievance statistics, shown in Chart 5 below, we noticed an increase in August and September 2008. Our initial impression was that there might be morale or other relationship issues at ISP.

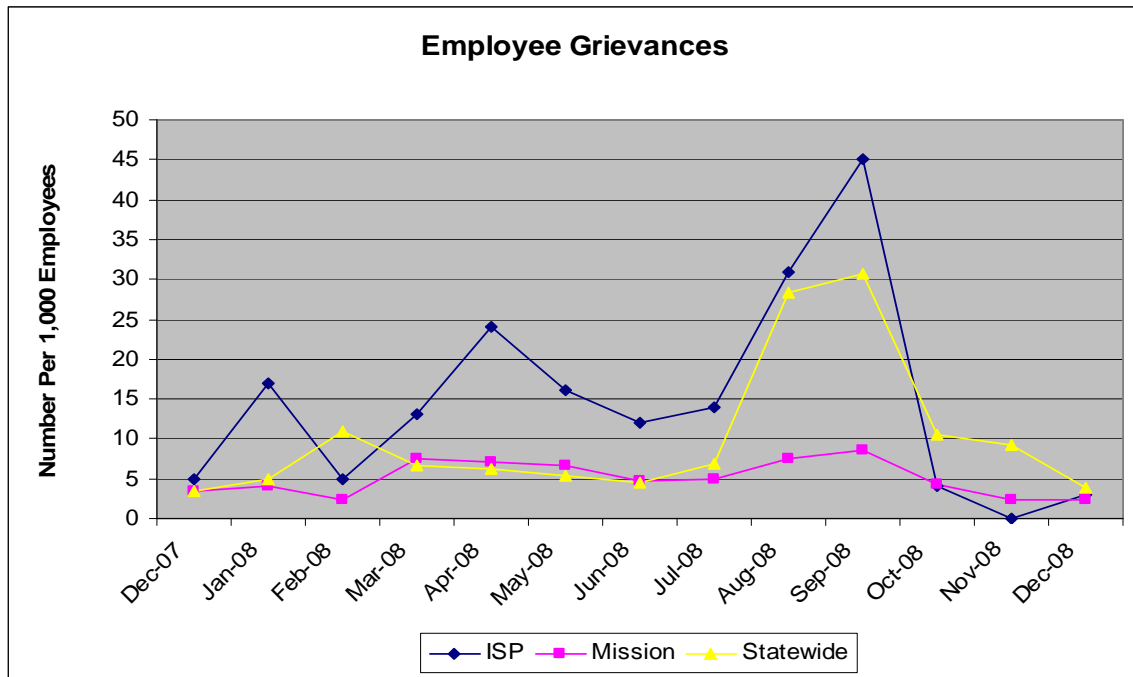
However, during in-person interviews, we learned the spike in grievances was mostly due to a high number of staff redirected from their normal work areas to cover absent or ill employees in other areas. According to one employee, the state directed prisons to reduce overtime during California's financial and budget crisis. In response to CDCR and state direction, ISP redirected employees which ultimately reduced overtime in August and

September 2008. According to the same ISP employee, many correctional officers were upset they lost overtime and consequently filed large numbers of grievances for redirection and lost overtime.

When we questioned leaders from ISP’s California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA) about the high number of grievances, they stated, “We do not communicate with the warden unless it is in writing through the formal grievance process.” Conversely, other CCPOA members commented they do not agree with a *no verbal communication* stance and their issue is not really with the warden, but with the Governor and his administration.

Despite budget issues and grievances, most responses on both the survey and in-person comments tended to be highly favorable of the warden with regard to employee-management relations. Warden Herndon told us that it bothers her that she has been unable to form a better relationship with CCPOA leadership. According to Warden Herndon, her door is always open to meet with them.

Chart 5:



Source: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, COMPSTAT ending December 31, 2008, Ironwood State Prison. Unaudited data.

Other Employee-Management Relations

Employees cited several other activities the warden has completed to improve her relationship with employees. Some of the activities include family night, Warden’s rap, and the ISP newsletter. The ISP family night was an experience where all ISP employees were able to bring their families for a night of fun and to let them see what the employees

do at work. The Warden’s rap meeting allowed employees to express concerns or comments about areas they felt were important.

In addition, department officials and ISP managers rated Herndon favorably on her management skills and qualities. We surveyed nine department officials and 18 ISP managers and asked them to consider the warden’s performance in six management skills and qualities and rate the performance as either unacceptable, improvement needed, satisfactory, very good, or outstanding. As shown in Table 6, the survey results indicate that Warden Herndon is performing at an outstanding level in several management categories. The results of this survey are consistent with many comments we received from employees during our site visit.

Table 6: Rating of Warden’s Management Skills and Qualities

Category	Rating
Personal Characteristics/Traits	Outstanding
Relationships with Others	Outstanding
Leadership	Outstanding
Communication	Outstanding
Decision Making	Very Good
Organization/Planning	Very Good

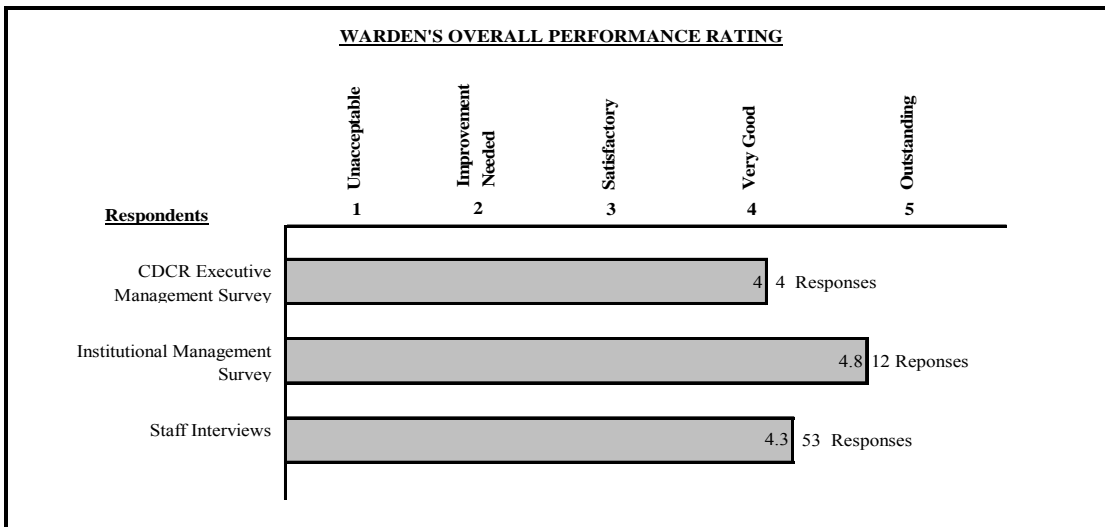
Source: OIG survey of CDCR and ISP Management.

Overall Summary

Our random employee survey asked respondents to assess whether or not they feel the warden is an effective leader. Of the respondents that provided either a positive or a negative opinion, 91 percent gave positive responses that they either agree or strongly agree with the statement that she is an effective leader. The remaining nine percent stated that they disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

We also asked survey respondents and interviewees to rate the warden’s performance on a five-point scale from unacceptable to outstanding. The results are shown in the chart below.

Chart 6:



Source: CDCR and ISP management survey results and ISP employee interviews.

In conclusion, according to the institution's employees, CDCR management, and external stakeholders, Warden Herndon is doing a very good to outstanding job at managing the prison's operations. More importantly, interviewees responding to our questions about the overall performance of the warden said that ISP's operations have improved since Herndon took over the administration.

Appendix

Results from our survey of institution employees

To prepare for our site visit, we randomly selected 257 of the institution's employees and sent them a survey. The survey provides us with information about employees' perception of the warden's overall performance plus information about specific operational areas at the prison—Safety and Security, Inmate Programming, Business Operations, and Employee-Management Communication. Sixty-four ISP employees responded to our survey—a 25 percent response rate. To simplify our analysis of the survey results, we grouped survey respondents by category and identified response trends.

Specifically, we grouped the respondents into three employment categories: Custody; Health Care; and Other, which include employees in education, plant operations, administration, clerical, and other non-custody/non-health care positions. Then, to identify strong trends or patterns, we classified the responses to our questions as either positive or negative. For example, if the respondent 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with our question, we classified it as positive; and if the respondent 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with our question, as negative. We did not include passive responses. For example, if employees responded that they were 'neutral' or responded 'unknown' to our question, we excluded their response. We report those results in a table on the following page.

Appendix: Compilation of Institutional Employee Survey Responses - Ironwood State Prison

Operational Area/Question	Respondents' Employment Category						Total Responses			
	Custody		Health Care		Other		Pos	(%)	Neg	(%)
<u>Safety and Security</u>										
• You are able to complete required (mission critical) assignments in your work area.	20	1	9	1	23	2	52	93%	4	7%
• You have been issued or have access to all of the safety equipment you need.	23	0	9	1	24	1	56	97%	2	3%
• You receive all required (mandatory) training.	22	0	6	2	19	7	47	84%	9	16%
• The employee investigation/disciplinary process works as intended (is appropriate and timely).	9	5	2	3	8	10	19	51%	18	49%
• The CDC-115, inmate disciplinary process works as intended (is appropriate and timely).	20	1	6	2	8	7	34	77%	10	23%
• The CDC-602, inmate appeal process works as intended (is appropriate and timely).	17	3	8	2	11	5	36	78%	10	22%
• The use and duration of inmate lockdown time or modified program time is appropriate.	5	13	6	2	9	4	20	51%	19	49%
• The institution is meeting its mission(s) under the current warden's leadership. ¹	17	2					17	89%	2	11%
Totals	133	25	46	13	102	36	281		74	
<i>Percent of Respondents by Category</i>	<i>84%</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>78%</i>	<i>22%</i>	<i>74%</i>	<i>26%</i>	<i>79%</i>		<i>21%</i>	
<u>Inmate Programming</u>										
• The inmate assignment process works as intended (appropriate placement).	13	5	6	0	11	3	30	79%	8	21%
• Inmate programming is adequate (sufficient number of education and work placements).	15	3	8	0	7	7	30	75%	10	25%
• The institution is meeting its mission(s) under the current warden's leadership. ¹			6	1	17	3	23	85%	4	15%
Totals	28	8	20	1	35	13	83		22	
<i>Percent of Respondents by Category</i>	<i>78%</i>	<i>22%</i>	<i>95%</i>	<i>5%</i>	<i>73%</i>	<i>27%</i>	<i>79%</i>		<i>21%</i>	
<u>Business Operations</u>										
• Your assigned work area has enough staff to get all of the required work done.	13	8	9	1	16	8	38	69%	17	31%
• Plant Operations is able to meet maintenance / repair needs in your assigned work area.	10	10	3	2	15	6	28	61%	18	39%
• Plant Operations is able to meet maintenance / repair needs in inmate areas.	11	7	5	1	8	4	24	67%	12	33%
Totals	34	25	17	4	39	18	90		47	
<i>Percent of Respondents by Category</i>	<i>58%</i>	<i>42%</i>	<i>81%</i>	<i>19%</i>	<i>68%</i>	<i>32%</i>	<i>66%</i>		<i>34%</i>	
<u>Employee-Management Relations</u>										
• The warden is knowledgeable about the day to day operations in your work area.	16	5	5	2	18	4	39	78%	11	22%
• The employee grievance process works as intended (is appropriate and timely).	12	3	3	2	11	7	26	68%	12	32%
• The warden works effectively with the local bargaining unit representatives.	14	2	4	1	15	1	33	89%	4	11%
• The warden regularly speaks or meets with inmates.	22	0	2	0	13	1	37	97%	1	3%
• You are kept up to date on issues that affect CDCR as a whole.	16	7	5	1	19	4	40	77%	12	23%
• The warden regularly visits your workplace.	12	5	2	5	13	10	27	57%	20	43%
• The warden welcomes feedback, including criticism from institution staff.	14	2	5	1	17	4	36	84%	7	16%
• The warden is knowledgeable about the day to day operations.	18	3	4	1	17	1	39	89%	5	11%
• The warden is accessible to you to discuss issues.	14	2	4	1	18	3	36	86%	6	14%
• The warden does not abuse his/her power or authority.	20	2	5	1	18	3	43	88%	6	12%
• The warden emphasizes an institutional culture calling for staff to have integrity and be highly ethical, professional, honest, motivated, and respectful.	20	2	6	1	22	4	48	87%	7	13%
• The warden emphasizes an institutional culture calling for cultural sensitivity and discrimination prevention, including sexual harassment prevention.	17	3	5	1	20	4	42	84%	8	16%
Totals	195	36	50	17	201	46	446		99	
<i>Percent of Respondents by Category</i>	<i>84%</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>75%</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>81%</i>	<i>19%</i>	<i>82%</i>		<i>18%</i>	
<u>Overall Warden Rating</u>										
Considering all institutional challenges, the current warden is an effective leader.	19	2	5	1	19	1	43	91%	4	9%
<i>Percent of Respondents by Category</i>	<i>90%</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>83%</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>95%</i>	<i>5%</i>	<i>91%</i>		<i>9%</i>	

Source: OIG, institutional employee survey results for ISP

¹ This question applies to more than one operational area.

Response from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

P.O. Box 942883
Sacramento, CA 94283-0001



November 9, 2009

Mr. David R. Shaw
Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General
P.O. Box 348780
Sacramento, CA 95834-8780

Dear Mr. Shaw:

We are pleased to submit this response to your draft report entitled *Ironwood State Prison, Warden Debra Herndon, One-Year Audit* and agree with the favorable assessment of Warden Herndon.

According to your report Warden Herndon is outstanding at managing the prison's operations at Ironwood State Prison (ISP) and acknowledge your commendation of Warden Herndon as being instrumental in reducing overtime by implementing a sick leave accountability program reducing ISP's sick leave by more than half, and for developing ISP's Incident Command System for use in the event of a major incident or catastrophe. Many staff commented that the institution is safer and more secure under Warden Herndon. We concur that Warden Herndon is a leader in institutional communication and external community relations, and under her command, ISP has the most successful on line prison college program in the State.

We would like to thank the Office of the Inspector General for this outstanding report. If you should have any questions or concerns, please call my office at (916) 323-6001.

Sincerely,


SCOTT KERNAN
Undersecretary, Operations

cc: Debra Herndon, Associate Director (A), Female Offender Programs and Services