

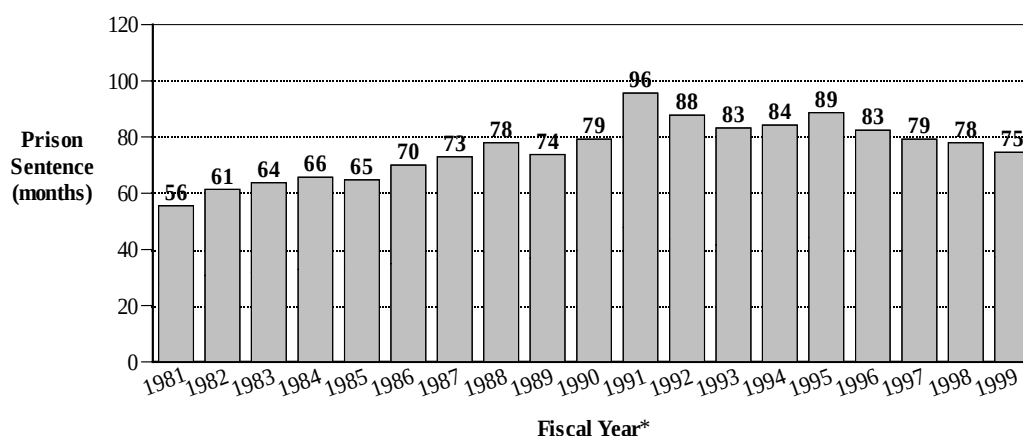
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Average Length of Federal Drug Sentences Reaches Lowest Point in Past Decade

In 1999, the average time spent in federal prison for a drug charge was 75 months, according to an analysis of data from the Administrative Office of the United States Courts. This is the shortest average prison sentence for a drug charge since 1989 (when the average sentence was 74 months). While the severity of the drug offenses actually being adjudicated in the 1990s may have decreased, there are several other factors that may account for this downward trend in sentence length. For example, defendants may be receiving a reduction in sentence length for providing assistance in related criminal investigations. Another possibility raised by the analysis is that federal judges may be enacting lesser sentences for low level drug offenders.

**Average United States Courts Prison Sentence,
Fiscal Years 1981-1999**



*A fiscal year is defined as the 12-month period from October 1st through September 30th.

NOTE: The Administrative Office of the United States Courts collects data on the caseload and activities of the Federal judiciary including district court judges, magistrate judges, and the probation and pretrial services system.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from The Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), "Overall Sentencing Trends in Drug Enforcement," *DEA at Work*, (2000). Available online at <http://www.trac.syr.edu/tracdea/findings/aboutDEA/drugSentences.html>.

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