

# **Developing a Program of Postsecondary Academic Instruction in State Prisons (Grant Number R305B070077) Research Performance Progress Report June, 2012**

This progress report describes work completed during Year 5 (July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012), which is the final year of the project, completed under a no-cost extension of the contract. After a brief overview, progress is described according to the following seven requirements of the Research Performance Progress Report: (1) accomplishments, (2) products, (3) participants & other collaborating organizations, (4) impact, (5) changes/problems; (6) special reporting requirements; and (7) budgetary information.

## **Project Overview**

Through a partnership with the Correctional Education Association (CEA) and Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), the College of the Air offers general education/liberal arts and sciences courses leading to an Associate of Arts degree to students in prison. The Correctional Education Association College of the Air (CEA/COA) program has potential to increase access to and completion of college courses in the nation's correctional facilities, leading to college degrees. The program was initially delivered via the Transforming Lives Network (TLN), a satellite network designed to provide a variety of educational programming to correctional facilities. Because TLN discontinued operation in summer 2009, CEA/COA programming has since been delivered to prisons via prerecorded courses on DVD. CEA/COA has the potential to increase access, persistence, and completion of courses by incarcerated offenders leading to postsecondary degrees. This study was designed to obtain impact data to determine the efficacy of this approach and to support the development of the program.

Prisons in the study represented a combination of minimum, medium, and maximum security institutions and participants included offenders who (a) were between the ages of 18 and 35, (b) had a release date between 1 and 7 years, (c) had a high school diploma or equivalent, (d) were charged with an offense that met federal eligibility criteria for participation and (e) were provided with external grant funding to support tuition costs<sup>1</sup>. A cluster randomized trial design was used in which prisons were randomly assigned to receive CEA/COA programming or other programming that would normally be offered. Data were collected during three consecutive academic years, between fall 2008 and spring 2011. Outcomes were compared for participants in CEA/COA and control sites and included academic achievement, achievement motivation, educational aspirations, progress toward completing a postsecondary degree, and perceptions of institutional climate. Qualitative data included observations and interviews with participants and administrators in a representative sample of sites. These data were used to closely examine implementation components, to triangulate data collected using other methods, and to inform design and refinement of CEA/COA content and delivery.

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<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the 2009-2010 academic year, study eligibility criteria were modified to correspond to new criteria for participation in the federal *Grants to States for Workplace and Community Transition Training for Incarcerated Individuals Program*, which is the funding source for most study participants.

Data analyses examined: (1) the nature and extent of CEA/COA instructional delivery and associated institutional support; (2) the nature and extent of inmate participation in CEA/COA and other types of postsecondary academic instruction; and (3) the effect of CEA/COA on participant outcome measures. Measures of program implementation, student engagement, and other factors were examined to provide information about the extent to which they affected the impact of participation in CEA/COA.

## **1. ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### ***1A. What are the major goals of the project?***

#### ***Project Goals***

As indicated in the project Performance Agreement, the specific results to be derived from this project included the following:

- An intervention that focuses on improving access, persistence, and completion of postsecondary academic education at correctional institutions.
- Evidence of the potential efficacy of this intervention, including impact on academic achievement outcomes and progress toward postsecondary academic degrees. Other outcomes to be examined include rates of participation in postsecondary academic programming, academic motivation and educational aspirations; post-release employability; institutional climate; and rates of recidivism.
- Qualitative case study data from a representative sample of study sites that provide additional evidence about how the intervention affects outcomes.
- Quantitative and qualitative data about participant exposure to different aspects of course content and delivery, participant and institutional characteristics, and other factors that affect outcomes to inform design and refinement of CEA/COA content and delivery.

#### ***Activities During Year 5***

Data collection for the project was completed in spring 2011. Year 5 project activities focused on entry, cleaning, and analysis of Cohort 3 posttest data; collection of recidivism data from states; design and implementation of cumulative analyses of the three-cohort data set; and preparation of the final impact analysis report.

## ***1B. What was accomplished under these goals?***

### ***1Bi. Entry, Cleaning, and Analysis of Cohort 3 Posttest Data***

Preliminary qualitative and quantitative data analyses were presented as part of past Annual Reports. Item scaling, data cleaning, and exploratory analyses of the Cohort 3 data set were completed, including student- and facility-level information collected from surveys, assessments, and other data collection tools. A comprehensive 3-year data set including student- and facility-level data was created to facilitate hierarchical analyses and an integrated data set with sufficient power to examine proposed analyses. Exploratory and descriptive analyses were conducted to assess readiness for impact analyses. Several issues were identified related to needs for file cleaning, matching, sample and measure construction, and missing data. These issues were resolved and decisions are reflected in the final impact analysis plan described below.

### ***1Bii. Design and Implementation of Cumulative Analyses of the Three-Cohort Data Set***

A written analysis plan was developed that describes plans for final impact analyses that meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards, including: plans for sample identification; descriptive analyses; attrition analyses; strategies for addressing missing data; group equivalency analyses; confirmatory and exploratory impact analyses; sensitivity analyses; analyses of variation in program impact (i.e., analyses of program implementation and other variables and analyses of moderation by cohort and student engagement); and correction for multiple comparisons. Analyses were completed as described in the plan.

### ***1Biii. Preparation of the Final Impact Analysis Report***

A manuscript for publication was developed based on results from the cumulative analyses described above. The report is designed to present impact analysis results with necessary detail that would facilitate external review by the WWC or other critical review audience and to discuss implications for policy and practice. Several journals have been identified as possible venues for the article including those that serve the policy, research, and practitioner communities in the areas of correctional education and community college. Contact with journal editors has revealed strong interest.

### ***1Biv. Collection of Recidivism Data from States***

Administrators in each of the seven states that participated in the study were first contacted about collection of recidivism data in spring 2011. Initial conversations focused on the purpose of collection of these data, data availability, the potential of identifying a matched sample for comparison purposes, protocols for release of individual-level data, expected turnaround times for external data requests, and optimal mechanisms and file formats for sharing data. Five of the seven states indicated willingness to share data and were told to expect a request from the research team in early 2012, (to maximize the time elapsed and data available post-release). Administrators in each of these five states were contacted again in early 2012, sent password-protected files with student information, and asked to return updated data files with individual-level data that would facilitate analysis of recidivism (release date and, if applicable: date of first

re-incarceration, offence type, and new sentence length). Only two states provided data, despite multiple follow-up requests.

**2. N/A**

**3. PARTICIPANTS & OTHER COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS**

**3A. What individuals have worked on the project?**

The members of the research team remained consistent throughout the entire duration of the project, with the exception of a consultant who was hired to support the final impact analyses. Exhibit 1 presents names of key project personnel and their roles.

**Exhibit 1: Key Project Personnel and Roles**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>
<b>S. Steurer</b>	Project Director
<b>S. Meyer</b>	Principal Investigator
<b>F. Freeman</b>	Research Assistant
<b>L. Fredericks</b>	Qualitative Analyst
<b>B. Randel</b>	Quantitative Analyst (Consultant, 2011-2012 only)
<b>C. Borden</b>	Field Researcher
<b>P. Richardson</b>	Field Researcher

**3B. What other organizations have been involved as partners?**

The study included prisons in Iowa, Massachusetts, Nevada, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Wisconsin. The primary partner organizations and their roles remained consistent throughout the duration of the project and include the Correctional Education Association (budget and project oversight), RMC Research Corporation (research design, data analysis, and reporting), and Northstar Correctional Education Services (site recruitment and data collection).

**3C. Have other collaborators or contacts been involved?**

Throughout the study, Milwaukee Area Technical College provided the CEA/COA program at intervention sites. Control sites in each state contracted with local community colleges or universities to provide postsecondary programming as follows: **Iowa** – Kirkwood Community College, Des Moines Area Community College, Grinnell College; **Massachusetts** – Boston University, Mt. Wachusett Community College; **Nevada** – College of Southern Nevada, Western Nevada College; **Oklahoma** – Conners State College, Rose State College, Eastern Oklahoma State College, Western Oklahoma State College; **South Carolina** – Piedmont Technical College, Midlands, Technical College, Spartanburg Community College, Central Carolina Technical College. Wisconsin – Univeristy of Wisconsin, Platteville.

**4. IMPACT**

**4A. What is the impact on the development of the principal discipline(s) of the project?**

***Demonstration of Rigorous Experimental Research Methods.*** A primary contribution of this project is the application of rigorous experimental research methods to a study in the field of correctional education research. The study is the first of its kind in many respects in that it features a multi-state sample, uses a random-assignment design, focuses on academic achievement outcomes, and examines a comprehensive set of outcomes using various data sources. Much of the research in correctional education tends to be descriptive, quasi-experimental, and often relies on small and local study samples, limiting the strength of conclusions that can be drawn from findings. This study's design, methodologies, and data collection tools can serve as exemplars for future research in the field, including rigorous efficacy studies.

***Information to Guide Program Development and Implementation.*** While analyses of the CEA/COA program impact revealed no positive findings relative to other types of programs, they suggest that an effectively implemented distance education model has the potential to achieve outcomes that are similar to those of other types of programs that include traditional onsite classroom instruction. Interim analyses of program implementation suggest several factors that facilitate effective implementation of postsecondary academic programs related to selection of program participants and the kinds of supports that are needed for success. Qualitative data, in particular, reveal challenges across programs that must be addressed for effective implementation. These findings help to reinforce and clarify implementation components that are associated with program success.

Two articles have been published in the *Journal of Correctional Education*. The first article focused on implementation issues, based primarily on qualitative data. The second article focused on factors related to outcomes, based primarily on quantitative data collected via surveys, program administrator records, and student assessments. Two additional manuscripts have been developed based on study data. The first has been submitted for publication and the second will be submitted subsequent to the grant period. The first manuscript provides practical guidance to administrators and educators about establishing or expanding college programs in prisons. The second presents cumulative program impact findings. Taken together, these findings are expected to help the administrator, educator, policy maker communities to make better decisions related to the selection, development, and implementation of postsecondary academic programs in prison settings. This type of information is especially needed in a time of diminishing federal and state resources for this type of programming.

#### ***4B. What is the impact on other disciplines?***

Study methodologies and results are expected to have primary impact within the discipline of correctional education. However, findings are also relevant to research examining the transition to postsecondary education and the supports needed for students with relatively weak academic backgrounds who are experiencing college courses for the first time. This study identified factors associated with college success among youth offenders in prison that are consistent with other research exploring factors associated with success in college in more traditional college settings (e.g., Pascarella et al., 2011; Tinto, 1993).

While this study was focused on academic achievement, achievement motivation, and related outcomes, an outcome of primary interest to correctional educators and the broader field of criminology is recidivism. Access to data from state systems created challenges to examining these outcomes; however, this study provides a model which can be replicated or adapted to examine recidivism and other long-term outcomes in settings where data are available.

#### **4C. What is the impact on the development of human resources?**

***Improved Opportunities to Participate in College.*** The study provided financial incentives for sites to participate, which motivated increased opportunities for students to participate in postsecondary academic programs. In many cases, prisons were able to increase the number of students who were offered the opportunity to participate in college for the first time. Youth offenders in prison represent demographic groups that are underrepresented in college and the study helped to increase college access.

***Support for Implementation of Postsecondary Programs.*** Throughout the project, field research staff helped to build capacity among education administrators and site coordinators at study sites to effectively implement programs. Support and training to these staff members focused on facilitating contract development to allow for provision of postsecondary programs and management of challenges related to program delivery related to: student enrollment procedures, access to books and course materials, maintenance of communication between colleges and prisons, instructor responsiveness issues, transcript requests, and security concerns. Qualitative data reports were also shared with CEA/COA program administrators annually to inform program development.

***Enhanced Understanding of Research.*** The study exposed state and prison administrators, educators, and students to a rigorous and comprehensive, multi-year research study. For example, a small group of state administrators and prison educators were provided with financial support to attend annual conferences to learn about study progress. Briefs of study progress and findings were also disseminated to all state and prison administrators and all students who participated in the study. These activities have likely contributed to understanding of research, its purposes and utility, and the requirements associated with complex studies among these constituencies. This improved understanding could positively impact their perception of or receptivity to research and research findings and potentially influence the extent to which practice and policy are evidence-based over time.

***Improved Student Understanding of College Process.*** Incarcerated individuals rarely arrive in prison with any experience navigating the college enrollment process or academically prepared for college. Eager students expressed interest in earning college credit but demonstrated little or no understanding of the process by which these credits are earned. Throughout the study institutional education personnel and the research team developed methods to cultivate this understanding among students.

***Increased Student Motivation for Achieving College Readiness.*** Many participating sites initiated postsecondary academic programming for this study. Word quickly spread throughout those institutions that “real college” was available, increasing motivation to complete requisite secondary preparation and creating competition for limited seats. This focus on secondary

preparation created greater awareness among students, educators, and administrators of the gaps between traditional secondary benchmarks such as the GED and college readiness. Developmental courses were added in many prisons during the course of the study to bridge these gaps.

***Presented Opportunities for Personnel Training.*** Assisting security and non-education personnel in understanding the importance of rigorous research and postsecondary programming for inmates became secondary activities for field researchers seeking access to students via security procedures. Initial resistance to both was strong from all levels of administration and security personnel. After observing behavioral changes in students participating in postsecondary programming, many began to seek understanding regarding programming and research.

***Focus on Need for and Expansion of Available Programming.*** This project brought postsecondary *academic* programming to some institutions that had formerly focused on vocational programming. With the introduction of such courses, student interest increased beyond the capacity of programs to accommodate them, creating waiting lists and requiring revised eligibility requirements. Partnerships between local community colleges and state correctional institutions were reinforced and/or expanded in many settings. Several of these relationships and are expected to continue beyond the purview of this project.

#### ***4D. What is the impact on physical, institutional, and information resources that form infrastructure?***

***Improved Understanding of Utility of and Methodologies for Using Administrative Data.*** Efforts to connect study data to state administrative data had mixed success—only two of seven states were ultimately willing to provide individual-level information on study participant recidivism. However, this project has laid groundwork for potential future success in this area. Several state administrators expressed strong initial interest about sharing data and were interested in findings from efforts to link these data sources. Ultimately, limited resources at the state level (e.g., staff time to fulfill data requests, protocols for ensuring confidentiality) likely explain the challenges faced. Conversations with state administrators led to development of a model for collecting administrative data that responds to common concerns. As the utility of administrative data to create efficiencies in program and policy research becomes better understood, approaches like this one may be more effectively implemented.

***Improved Awareness of National Data Needs and Structures.*** National efforts to refine correctional education data elements and reporting protocols are ongoing. A national Reentry Model entitled *A Reentry Education Model; Supporting Education and Career Advancement for Low-Skill Individuals in Corrections* is being released this summer which addresses data needs throughout the correctional and post-release process. This development team and those who continue to refine the national Correctional Education *Data Resource Guide* are looking closely at the impact of this project to determine what kinds of postsecondary data elements and structures best serve the field.

#### ***4E. What is the impact on society beyond science and technology?***

The study helped to support increased access to college in institutions with limited resources by examining a low-cost postsecondary academic program with a distance delivery model that could provide access to college in sites where there are no similar local resources available. Increasing access to college in these settings has the potential to afford students with a first exposure to college, which in turn has the potential to improve their social and economic conditions and decrease the risk of future crime.

#### ***4F. What dollar amount of the award's budget is being spent in foreign country(ies)?***

No amount of the budget is being spent in foreign country(ies).

### **5. CHANGES/PROBLEMS**

#### ***5A. Changes in Approach and Reasons for Change***

The final year of the project focused on final data analysis and collection of recidivism data. The final impact analyses proceeded as expected and no changes were needed. Available recidivism data did not support planned analyses; however these individual-level analyses were secondary and were not part of initial analysis plans.

#### ***5B. Actual or Anticipated Problems or Delays and Actions or Plans to Resolve Them***

Nothing to report (no actual or anticipated problems).

#### ***5C. Changes that Have a Significant Impact on Expenditures***

Nothing to report (no changes had a significant impact on expenditures).

#### ***5D. Significant Changes in Use or Care of Human subjects, Vertebrate Animals, and/or Biohazards***

There were no changes to study protocols. Study protocols were approved for continuing review in April 2012. The current approval remains in effect through April 18, 2013. The external IRB approval for the overall study met local requirements for review of external research in most states. During the 2011-2012 academic year, the team continued to work with states that had additional human subjects review requirements to ensure that they were met.

#### ***5E. Change of Primary Performance Site Location from that Originally Proposed***

Nothing to report (there were no changes).