

# **Developing a Program of Postsecondary Academic Instruction in State Prisons (Grant Number R305B070077) Final Report September, 2012**

This report describes work completed during the course of the study (July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2012). After a brief project overview, this report is organized according to the following three sections: (a) narrative responses; (b) budget; and (c) additional 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.

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

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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.

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.

## **SECTION A: NARRATIVE RESPONSES**

*Please report on each Measure, Indicator, or Benchmark listed in Part II of your Performance Agreement. Do this only for the last year (final budget year) of your project. Describe how you met each objective listed. Include details on what was done, how it was done, and findings. If you were in a no-cost extension year, describe what you accomplished during the no-cost extension year.*

This section presents a summary of progress during the last year of the project, which was completed under a no-cost extension. The following four primary activities were undertaken during the final year of the project: (1) entry, cleaning, and analysis of cohort 3 posttest data; (2) design and implementation of cumulative analyses of the three-cohort data set; (3) preparation of the final impact analysis report; and (4) collection of recidivism data from states. Each of these activities is described below.

***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.

***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.

***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.

***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.

## **SECTION B: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

***PUBLICATIONS.*** *Include a cumulative list of publications for the project. Attach copies of publications that are products of the grant that are not already on file at IES. Note that the Institute asks IES-funded investigators to also voluntarily submit their publications to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). Click on “For Authors” at: <http://eric.ed.gov>*

The following publications were developed based on findings from the project and are attached.

Meyer, S.J. & Randel, B. (manuscript under development). The impact of an associate’s degree program for prison inmates: A randomized trial of the Correctional Education Association College of the Air program.

Borden, C., Richardson, P., & Meyer, S. J. (2012). Establishing successful postsecondary academic programs: A practical guide. *Journal of Correctional Education, 63*(2), 6-26.

Meyer, S. J. (2011). Factors affecting student success in postsecondary academic correctional education programs. *Journal of Correctional Education, 62*(2), 132-164.

Meyer, S. J., Fredericks, L., Borden, C. M., & Richardson, P. L. (2010). Implementing postsecondary academic programs in state prisons: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Correctional Education, 61*(2), 148-183.