



Correctional Education Association College of the Air Program
National Study of College Programs in State Prisons
Summer 2010 Project Update

Thank you for participating in the National Study of College Programs in State Prisons!

This project update provides information about the project and selected results from preliminary analyses of survey, interview, and focus group data collected during the 2009-2010 academic year. Data were collected at 43 state prisons in Iowa, Massachusetts, Nevada, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. Additional case study data were collected at a randomly selected sample of sites in each state. Comprehensive reports that examine outcomes for students across sites will be available after data collection is complete in late 2011.

College of the Air

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 great potential to increase access to and completion of college courses in the nation's correctional facilities, leading to college degrees.

The Study

CEA contracted with RMC Research Corporation and Northstar Correctional Education Services to evaluate the impact of CEA/COA and to support the development of the program. This 3-year study began in fall 2008 and builds upon prior research documenting the relationship between education and post-release success, including reduced rates of recidivism and associated social and public cost savings. In addition to providing access to college programs in several prisons where it was not previously available, the study has the potential to generate findings that may lead to increases in funding for correctional education and student access to college programs.

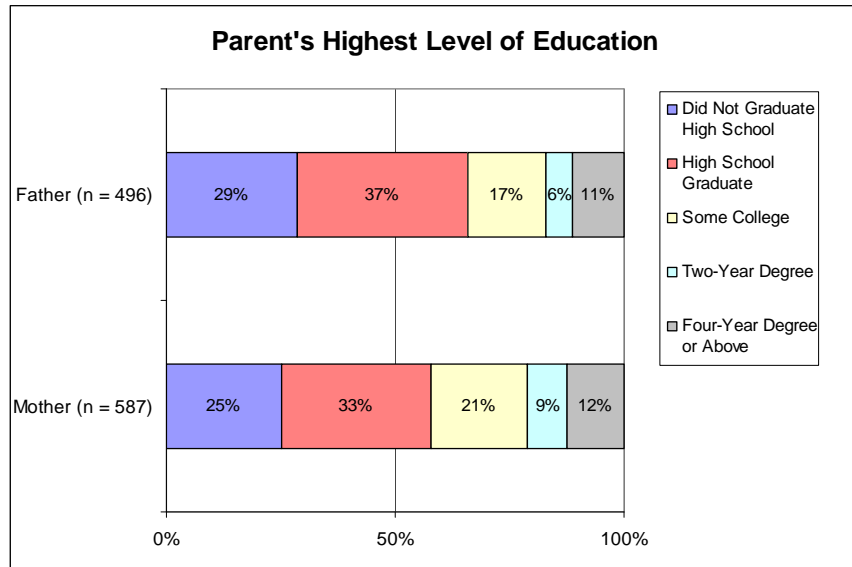
Prisons in the study represent a combination of minimum, medium, and maximum security institutions and participants include offenders who (a) are between the ages of 18 and 35, (b) have a release date between 1 and 7 years, (c) have a high school diploma or equivalent, (d) were charged with an offense that meets federal eligibility criteria for participation, and (e) are provided with external grant funding to support tuition costs. The study uses a random assignment design in which prisons are randomly assigned to receive CEA/COA programming or other postsecondary academic programming that would normally be offered.

Pre-release and post-release outcomes for participants in CEA/COA and control sites are being compared, including academic achievement, achievement motivation, educational aspirations, progress toward completing a postsecondary degree, and employability. Outcomes for institutions include participation in postsecondary and other academic programming, institutional climate, and rates of recidivism. Qualitative data include observations and interviews with students and administrators in a representative sample of sites.

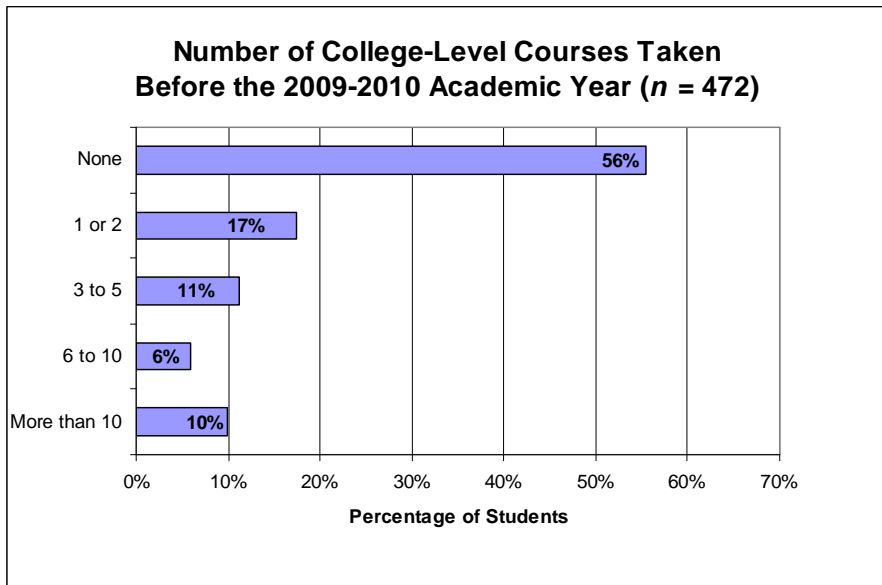
Selected Findings

Few college students had parents who completed college degrees. Based on fall 2009 student survey data, less than one fourth of students had parents who completed either a two-year or four-year college degree. About one third of parents of students in college programs were high school graduates and a just over a quarter of parents did not graduate from high school.

Many students received their high school diploma or equivalency (GED) while in prison. Among students who completed the fall 2009 survey, about half received their high school diploma or GED while in prison.



Most participating students had little or no prior college experience. Over half of participants



had taken no college courses before the 2009-2010 academic year. About one fourth of students took between one and five courses and only 10% of students had taken more than 10 courses. Students' prior college experience included courses at various community colleges and universities. Courses were taken in a wide variety of subject areas, such as business, accounting, computer science, social sciences, and humanities.

Students reported being highly motivated to participate in college programs. When asked about the primary reasons they participated in college programs, students at both CEA/COA and control sites mentioned a number of factors, including creating a better future for themselves and their families, gaining knowledge and/or skills that could be used after prison, having access to better jobs, avoiding a return to prison, gaining self-esteem and respect, and wanting to be a good role model.

I can do something better now instead of living my past life. I can do something to make myself better...not only in my own eyes but in the eyes of the public too. And that makes you feel better about yourself. It makes you want to try even more as well.
 – Student

Site coordinators and students cited a variety of positive outcomes associated with participation in CEA/COA and other college programs. Comments from students and site coordinators suggested that CEA/COA and other college programs had strong potential to achieve outcomes for students and institutions. Site coordinators identified improvements in student behavior and attitudes, including increased confidence, motivation, self-respect, leadership, and maturity. Students also attributed several outcomes to their participation in college programs including improved:

- Knowledge and skills to pursue better jobs and/or continue education after release;
- Social, communication, and critical thinking skills;
- Relationships with peers, including willingness to interact with and help out others in the program, and to be a role model for others; and
- Self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment.

State educational administrators, site coordinators and students also mentioned changes in prison climate, including improved relationships among students and between students and institution staff.

It gives me something to strive for. It gives me something to hope [for] and that changes me as a person. I no longer put my faith and hope in being able to rob and steal and do the things that I did to get in prison. I can now put my hope in saying, "Okay, the government does work. I can go to school. I can get an education and because of that I can get a job. I can show the world that I'm a better person and worthy to be a citizen of the United States of America." – Student

For our inmates, [participation in postsecondary programming] is giving them an opportunity that has opened their eyes. The ones that are getting released are getting excited about college. I think it has made them very aware of the opportunities that await them. Most of them are confident that they will be able to get into college and do well [after release]. – Site Coordinator

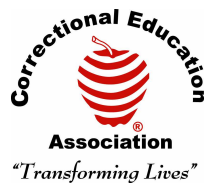
The climate of the prisons is different. These gentlemen gained a whole new sense of confidence. They're college students and are very proud of it. They have more contact with their families. In the classrooms, they're more responsible and say to their peers that they will help. They have learned to ask for help from other inmates or seek out help from the librarian. The inmates ask how to be in that program. It carries a lot of weight to be a college student. – State Administrator

Next Steps

Student survey and achievement data will be collected again during the 2010-2011 academic year. The research team will visit all prisons again to collect these data and to conduct interviews and focus groups in selected sites. Comprehensive analyses that examine student outcomes across sites will be conducted after data collection is complete in late 2011. Analyses will focus on CEA/COA instructional delivery and institutional support and the effect of CEA/COA on participant outcome measures.

Any questions or comments about the study may be directed to:

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