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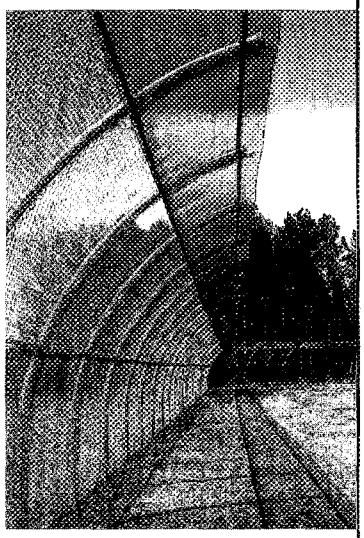

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Long-Distance Training For Staff and Inmates

Editor's note: *This column was prepared by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Office of Science and Technology.*

Correspondence courses for adult learning have been around for many years. However, the idea of using the Internet or a satellite, instead of the mailman, to deliver educational programs still is relatively new — especially in corrections. Often referred to as "long-distance learning," this "electronic" dissemination of knowledge already is having an impact both on those who administer the facilities and those who serve time there.

Why Long-Distance Learning?

Although not a total replacement for the classroom and on-site instructor, long-distance learning technologies hold the promise of providing individualized instruction 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These technologies have the potential to deliver training-on-demand to anyone, anywhere, at any time via an Internet connection, satellite feed or television signal. Other technology-related advantages include storage, retrieval and transference of data, such as tests, scores, assignments, class rosters and schedules, as well as customization of generic training programs with site-specific information. In addition, as computers and the Internet play an increasing role in society, both officers and offenders will feel more comfortable sitting down in front of a monitor and keyboard.

Distance Learning in Action

There are a number of federal and state training initiatives involving long-distance learning under way. The American Correctional Association (ACA), with funding from NIJ, has developed two online training courses: "Preventing and Managing Riots and Disturbances" and "Pepper Spray." The target audience is line staff, managers and trainers working in federal, state and local correctional facilities. Each course contains measurable objectives, a complete text teaching the objectives, embedded tests, chapter summaries, video streams, audio options, photos, hyperlinks for additional research and a final test.

The courses are available on the Internet at www.ldl.org. Interested individuals can take the courses by registering, selecting a course or courses and waiting for approval from the course administrator. Approval is received via e-mail, usually within 24 hours. The courses are being marketed to directors of corrections, training directors and line staff through ACA's home page (www.corrections.com/aca), *Corrections Today* and *On the Line*. For more information, contact Bill Taylor at btaylor@aca.org, or Tonya Brooks at tbrooks@aca.org.

A class titled "Internet Resources for Criminal Justice" is another effort by NIJ to keep corrections and law enforce-

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ment personnel from falling behind the Internet curve. Offered through its National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC)-Rocky Mountain in Denver, this class teaches participants how to make the most of the Internet as an information resource by introducing them to the ways various agencies use the Internet to dispense and solicit information.

Classes are held at the NLECTC-Rocky Mountain's host facility, the University of Denver. Agencies unable to travel to Denver can host training at their facilities. A computer laboratory with Internet access is necessary to host this class. NLECTC Rocky Mountain also provides a no-charge diskette titled "Criminal Justice Resources on the Internet," which contains addresses for nearly 400 Web sites in a well-organized, descriptive format that can easily be downloaded to a computer's Internet browser.

NIJ also is taking a lead role in facilitating the application of advanced distributed learning to public safety training requirements. The National Guard has made a major investment in equipment and other resources to link together National Guard armories to provide advanced distributed training (ADT) to its members across the country. ADT provides access to platform-independent, easy-to-modify interactive training across a network of facilities. For example, a training course being taught in one state can be telecast to armories across the country that are equipped to allow interaction between all the students and the teacher. Law enforcement and correctional agencies do not have the resources to set up a similar system. However, these equipped armories can be made available to law enforcement and corrections personnel for training that is distributed using the Guard network.

To make these Guard sites available to law enforcement and correctional agencies will require an initial federal investment. NIJ is creating a memorandum of understanding with the National Guard, the Reserve Component Consequence Management Program Integration Office, the Office of Readiness and Training Advanced Distributed Learning Initiative, and the Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division on the Application of Advanced Distributed Learning to Public Safety Training Requirements. These organizations are working together to develop the technological infrastructure and to test and evaluate the systems to distribute training to law enforcement and correctional officers and to disseminate lessons learned.

Training programs employing distance learning technologies also are offered by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). Two such staff development initiatives included interactive video conferences on managing infectious disease in correctional institutions and managing staff conflict in the workplace. NIC recently completed a videoconference series on staff supervision for corrections professionals. In addition, in June 1999, NIC presented its first training program for videoconference site coordinators, which was sent via satellite and Internet.

Because of the availability of new educational technologies, Robert M. Brown, chief of the NIC Training Academy in Longmont, Colo., is looking forward to 2001. At that point, he says, the Longmont Academy will have a dedicated staff and budget for distance learning. In the meantime, Brown plans to hold one or two long-distance events and

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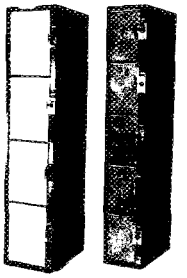

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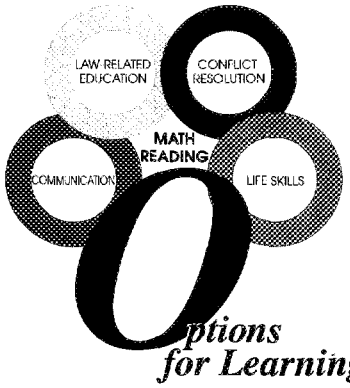

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one or two videoconferences in 2000. The academy is in the process of choosing appropriate courses and exploring presentation times and host site locations.

The future of distance training for prison inmates is being born in Pennsylvania. John Shaffer, deputy secretary of administration for the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PDOC) currently is reviewing proposals for a far-reaching distance training program for prison inmates.

The project entails integrating a satellite-delivered learning system with PDOC's cable system provider. Along with a standard package of cable television programming, the vendor chosen by PDOC will be required to provide distance learning to every state facility, in addition to instructors and curriculum content. Each facility will be equipped with one classroom that seats at least 20 to 25 students. Programs will include bilingual education, drug and alcohol information and programs that will allow teachers and students to communicate in real time.

According to Shaffer, this approach will give PDOC officials a consistent, standard cost-per-facility for educational technology. It also will make vendors more committed stakeholders in the mission of educating the system's inmates. He notes that online learning encompasses three main areas: delivery, support and management. Delivery and support are clearly in the vendor's area of responsibility, while management is a joint exercise between the vendor, state corrections officials and each site administrator.

Whether correctional staff will take advantage of the Pennsylvania system depends on the level of funding. But if it is at all possible, Shaffer says, correctional staff will be integrated into the system when feasible. There are no policies yet in place regarding inmate participation in distance learning programs, but Pennsylvania has minimum standards for education programs. Inmates currently must be on the fifth-grade literacy level, although the state has plans to raise the level in the coming year.

In addition to basic educational programming, PDOC officials see a need for trade-specific training. One example is the computerized laundry service run by the prison system for Pennsylvania's hospitals and welfare agencies. This complex system requires inmates to have thinking, computer and teamwork skills. By providing instruction and information around the clock, workers will not be limited if their learning speed is slower than other inmates. Also, changes to the work routine or job requirements can be widely and quickly broadcast to the entire work team.

What's Available

Statistics indicate that 49 percent of the inmate population does not have a high school diploma or a general equivalency diploma (GED). According to the National Institute for Literacy, 70 percent of the prison population falls within the lowest literacy levels. Distance learning programs developed for kindergarten through 12th-grade audiences can be adapted for the inmate population.

For example, in the Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC), the Corrections Distance Learning Network (CDLN) offers an array of training options. According to William Woolley, chief of the Bureau of Workforce Development and Distance Education, which oversees CDLN, the

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department has 48 downlink sites, 38 of which are in prison systems. Using satellite and two-way videoconferencing, CDLN provides educational programming and staff development training. Last year, CDLN offered 65 training programs to nearly 5,000 staff members. CDLN uses Florida State University's uplink services and shares transponder space on the Florida Department of Education's satellite.

CDLN has delivered a 30-part literacy series and a 25-part class in the basics of mathematics via satellite. Woolley says the company now is conducting two-way interactive GED classes from its office in Tallahassee, Fla., delivering them to two prisons in remote Florida locations.

"We also have a full electronic classroom, a small electronic 'teachers' office' and share a fully equipped production studio with public affairs in a symbiotic relationship," Woolley says. "Using satellite and videoconferencing technology, CDLN has provided GED and Adult Basic Education courses to more than 900 offenders.

Florida is part of another project that partners the FDOC with the Texas Youth Commission and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. Funded by a $10 million U.S. Department of Education Star Schools grant, the three states are developing the Justice Distance Learning Consortium, which it is hoped will provide state-of-the-art distance learning programs for incarcerated youths. (For more information visit www.safety-net.org.) Using the Internet, Intranet, CD-ROM, DVD, cable and satellite, the consortium will offer 1,500 hours of distance learning programming by the end of 1999.

The NIJ Office of Science and Technology supports the research and development of new technologies to improve policing, corrections and criminal justice operations in the United States.

Distance Learning Tips and Hints

- Satellite presentations, while helpful, still have limitations. Satellite images can be shaky and in a multipoint videoconference, the rotation of microphones among speakers can be tricky. It is important that microphones be muted until an attendee speaks. Presenters must remember to move and gesture slowly and need to consider the videocamera as one of the conference attendees.
- Technology improvements eventually will address these limitations and Web sites such as http://node.on.ca, provide current informational materials for people who are teaching and learning via long-distance technology. NODE Learning Technologies Network is a nonprofit electronic network for postsecondary educators.
- The smaller the student population, the greater the delivery cost of a long-distance learning approach.
- The success of any current training procedure reduces the need to switch to an-other approach just for student convenience.
- Correctional officers must be able to integrate new skills into their job performance. This kind of integration is best done through job shadowing or better yet, through role-playing and case study or scenario learning. Current distance learning technology may not be the optimum tool to provide or support this type of learning.

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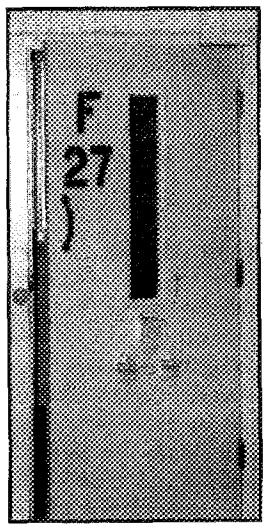

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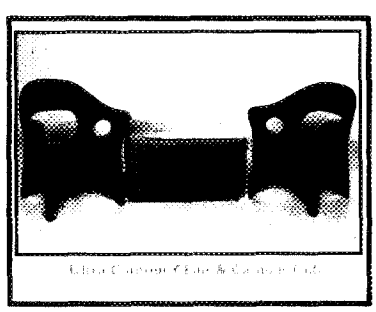

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